MANHUNT

WORLD'S BEST SELLING CRIME-FICTION MAGAZINE

EVERY STORY NEW!

JANUARY, 1957

35 CENTS

NEVER KILL A MISTRESS

by

CARROLL MAYERS

Also — JOHN D. MACDONALD • DAVID ALEXANDER

RICHARD WORMSER • THEODORE PRATT • BOB TURNER

VOL. 5, NO. 1 **MANHUNT** JANUARY, 1957

Cover by Ray Houlihan

CONTENTS

NOVELETTE

BAIT FOR THE RED-HEAD *by Eugene Pawley* 64

SHORT STORIES

THE RABBIT GETS A GUN *by John D. MacDonald* 1
COP FOR A DAY *by Henry Slesar* 8
FACE OF EVIL *by David Alexander* 15
SMART SUCKER *by Richard Wormser* 25
A RIDE DOWNTOWN *by Robert Turner* 39
SOMEBODY'S GOING TO DIE *by Talmage Powell* 43
HIS OWN JAILOR *by Bryce Walton* 53
STRANGER IN THE HOUSE *by Theodore Pratt* 95
. . . INTO THE PARLOR *by Paul Eiden* 101
NEVER KILL A MISTRESS *by Carroll Mayers* 115
SHOOT THEM DOWN *by Bob Bristow* 120
ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON *by Gil Brewer* 128
PERFECT GETAWAY *by Henry Petersen* 142

MICHAEL ST. JOHN, *Publisher*
R. E. DECKER, *General Manager*
WALTER R. SCHMIDT, *Editorial Director*
WILLIAM MANNERS, *Managing Editor*
CHARLES W. ADAMS, *Art Director*
N. F. KING, *Associate Editor*
GERALD ADAMS, *Assistant Art Director*
JOE SHORE, *Advertising Rep.*

MANHUNT VOLUME 5, NUMBER 1, January, 1957. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, $4.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere $5.00 (in U. S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Telephone MU 7-6623. Entered as Second Class matter at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. Additional entry at Concord, N. H. The entire contents of this issue are copyrighted 1956 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use, without express permission, of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Manhunt, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in U. S. A.

The Rabbit Gets a Gun

They were going to kill him. He saw it in their eyes, on their faces . . . and there wasn't a damn thing he could do.

BY JOHN D. MacDONALD

BY THE TIME he was ready to stop for the night, the good places were all filled up and he had to settle for a third rate setup—where he was charged five dollars for one of the sour little cabins back up on a slope behind a diner that smelled of grease and sweat.

He had parked beside the cabin, carried in a single suitcase, and now he sat on the sagging bed, looking down at the reflected glare of a naked light bulb on scuffed linoleum. He was full of the tensions and weariness of five hundred miles of driving in heavy relentless traffic. And this, he thought with bitter humor, is the first day of vacation.

When he had explained it to Marian, trying not to see the look of

hurt in her eyes, he had imagined it would be very different. "I'll just throw some stuff in the car, maybe some fishing tackle, and take off. No special destination."

"But I thought we—"

He interrupted her quickly, saying, "I've got to get a chance to think things out." He didn't want her to have a chance to remind him that on his vacation he had agreed that they could look for an apartment, perhaps select some furniture, and make other plans for their marriage.

"I didn't know," she said carefully, "that you had to think this out, Frank. If you've changed your mind, or you want to change your mind, all you have to do—"

"It isn't that. You know it isn't that. It's the job. It's Aldrich coming in and taking over when I thought they'd give it to me. I thought they'd have to give it to me."

Yet he knew that, in a sense, he had lied to her—and he knew she was aware of it. It was more than the job. It was her too. And the responsibilities of marriage.

He had thought that as soon as he left the city behind he would begin to think clearly and dispassionately, and he would feel a lift of spirits. But the twin problems had ridden with him throughout the long day. He still felt anger and resentment toward the firm. The least they could have done was give him warning, instead of sending Carl Aldrich in cold. But it was a big outfit, and a rough cold outfit, with branch offices in six states. They made small loans. Frank Lowell had started with them as a credit investigator, and, two years ago at twenty-six, had been made assistant office manager under George Syles. Three months ago George had been promoted to a job in the main offices, and before he left he told Frank in confidence that he had recommended him as new office manager, and it would only be a question of time until it was confirmed.

By then Frank had been going with Marian for eight months. She was a trim and pretty little dark-haired girl who worked in a large law office. They had agreed they would be married. He was confident of the future. They worked out a budget.

Then Carl Aldrich arrived, tall, breezy, confident, smiling – and at least a year younger than Frank. He was properly apologetic about being sent in to take over. He asked for Frank's loyalty and cooperation. And his sudden arrival turned a promising job into a dead end. It struck a heavy blow at Frank Lowell's confidence. It made their optimistic budget obsolete.

As he sat on the bed in the grubby cabin, he tried to understand the company's point of view. He knew his own limitations. People always seemed to have trouble remembering his name and his face. He couldn't make an impression like Aldrich could. Frank was not quite

five foot eight, with sandy complexion, pale blue eyes, a voice that did not carry well. Yet he had felt he made up for his ordinariness by dogged diligence. Under his direction the office loss ratio had been very low, even with the increase in new business. When borrowers were in trouble he had spent evenings with them, working on plans and budgets, explaining in his quiet voice just how it could all be worked out.

Maybe, he thought, it had something to do with the new advertising program in which they tried to personalize their services by putting a picture of the office manager in the newspaper ads. You would think someone in the home office though would be aware of the performance figures of the office, aware of him as a good manager. If it was a dead end job, he did not feel that he could afford to get married. And he knew how hard it would be for him to find another job. Personnel directors were never impressed by him. He remembered how hard it had been getting into the company for which he worked.

He found that he was out of cigarettes. He walked out of the cabin and stood for a time in the night. It was getting cooler. A fragrance of pine woods drifted down the slope. He watched the heavy evening traffic on the highway. Nearly all of the other cabins seemed to be occupied. He walked down the dark slope, stumbling a few times in the ruts of the road, and went into the heat and noise of the diner. A heavy man in a soiled apron stood behind the counter.

Frank walked up to him and said, "Cigarettes?"

The man stared at him with heavy, weary, contempt. He yawned and let the insolent seconds pass and finally said, "The machine, bud. The machine."

Frank flushed and turned and located the machine. He bought a pack and walked out again into the night. He was too depressed to be very angry. Perhaps the reaction of the fat man was a capsule demonstration of why this job, or any job, would be a dead end. Suppose Aldrich had asked the same question. "Right there behind you in the machine, sir." Maybe when you have no look or air of importance, all the world treats you with bored contempt, forgetting you the moment you turn away.

So engrossed was he in sour self-analysis that he forgot to count the cabins as he came up the hill. He looked up and saw the familiar contours of his car in the night, faintly illuminated by the cabin light that shone through the side window.

He opened the cabin door and walked in and stopped dead three feet inside the door. There were three people in the room. They all stared at him with identical expressions of shock and alarm. One of them moved very quickly, and Frank Lowell found himself, for the

first time in his life, staring at the muzzle of a gun. The man who held it was young. Perhaps nineteen. But his eyes were old and his mouth was cruel and old. He wore khaki pants and he was stripped to the waist. His arms and chest were heavy, muscular and deeply tanned. There was a flag tattooed on his upper arm.

"I told you to lock the door, Stel," he said. He did not look at the girl as he spoke. She was young, heavy, with a swarthy face, dark brows, hair burned blonde-white by dye.

"Honest I locked it. I turned the key. Honest."

"So I locked it too," the other boy said. "We both locked it, Al, so that makes it unlocked." The other boy was lean, blond, with a narrow face. He wore a T shirt and jeans. The girl wore dungarees and a red shiny shirt too large for her.

"You," Al said. "Take a step toward me. Fine. Now reach back with your left hand and shut the door."

As Frank did so, Al moved from the side of the bed. Frank looked at the articles on the bed. Wallets, lighters, jewelry, small wads of money. Al approached him casually, but carefully, stopping three feet away, the gun aimed at Frank's middle.

"Now, little man, how do you fit in?"

"I–I got the wrong cabin. I've got the same make car, same model." He heard his own voice with displeasure. It sounded painfully thin, scared and breathless.

"Turn slow and put your hands against the wall. Okay, now move your feet back toward me. That's it."

Frank found himself braced in such a way he could not possibly move quickly. He felt Al pat his pockets, take his wallet. He heard Al say, "Whitey, you go check for that car. Wait a minute. You got a wife or a girl friend with you, little man?"

"I'm alone."

Whitey came back in about three minutes. "Like he said, same car. Next door. The next one down the hill."

"Now lock the door and make sure it's locked. Let me take a look here. It says Frank Lowell. Okay, Frankie. Let go the wall and you can sit down. No, not the chair. Right there on the floor."

"What you going to do about him?" Whitey asked.

Al put the gun in the hip pocket of the khakis. He looked into Frank's wallet, took out the money. "Thirty-four bucks," he said. "And a lot more in travelers checks."

"Aren't they any good?" the girl asked.

"We don't mess with those. I told you before. Here, Frankie. Catch."

He missed the wallet. It slapped the wall beside his head, fell into his lap. He put it back in his pocket.

"What you going to do about

this guy now?" Whitey asked.

"You're getting yourself in a rut, boy. Come on. Let's finish this up and I'll be thinking about him. He isn't any trouble the way he is. He won't be any trouble. Take a good look if you get nervous. He's up to here in rabbit blood."

The three turned to the items on the bed. Frank sat and listened to them as they counted and divided. "It's a low score," Al complained. "Eight hundred and twenty-two bucks. And most of this stuff is junk."

"This here lighter is real gold. Lift it," Whitey said.

"Real gold, and with initials, you stupid punk. It gets buried with the wallets. You want to stay clean, you don't mess with stuff like this. These rings and this pin are okay to fence. I'll handle it like before and you get the cut later. Okay, four hundred eleven for me. You kids make your split any way you want. Whitey, you look like you don't like me taking the full half."

"Me? No, it's fine with me, Al. It's okay."

"That's good. Now wrap this stuff in a towel and take it out back. Take it off into those piney woods and bury it good."

After Whitey had gone, Al got the bottle out of the small bathroom. He poured some in a glass and handed it to Stel. He took a long drink from the bottle. He looked broodingly down at Frank.

"So what in blazes are we going to do about you, Frankie boy?"

"He's kinda cute," Stel joined in.

"And so scared his eyes pop out. Now you're seeing how the other half lives, Frankie. How do you like it?"

"What are you going to do?" Frank asked. He was obscurely pleased that he was able to ask the question so calmly, with no tremble in his voice.

"You got first names. You got descriptions. People like you love to yell cop. You get big attention. They take notes. They let you look at pictures. 'Sure, that's him. That's the one they call Al.' You just never should have walked in. You had bad luck, Frankie."

Whitey came back and Stel let him in. Whitey said, "This Frankie makes me nervous. You got any ideas."

They stood looking down at him.

"Now I got one," Al said. "It's getting cold enough so maybe somebody would use one of these gas heaters. Can't leave marks. Can you do it so there's no mark, Whitey?"

"Sure. Wrap the sap in a towel. But I don't—"

"Because you're stupid. We take him back to his place. Then he forgot to light the gas. And who's going to care too much what happens to this little jerk? Look at him."

The girl looked sick. "But we haven't ever—"

"You want to be soft-hearted or you want to do some time?"

"We better do it just like he says, honey," Whitey said to Stel.

And after a time of utter blankness in his mind, Frank Lowell realized that these three had every intention of killing him. He saw it in their eyes, on their faces. It was a grotesque realization. He had thought them people — rather twisted people, but still remotely human. He saw that he had been misled by their age. They were animal, not human. Their casualness had also misled him. And the indolent way his death had been discussed turned his mouth dry.

"I–I won't tell," he said.

Al smiled. "And on that we get a guarantee. Leave him sit for awhile. Later, there's less chance of anybody roaming around when we carry him over."

"Put him to sleep now?" Whitey said with too much eagerness.

"What's the point? He'll keep. He'll be nice. He'll wait right there for the F.B.I. to bust in. Only they won't. Get the cards, Whitey. Maybe you feel lucky."

They played cards. The girl kept looking over at Frank. She had a scared apprehensive look. It was only her frequent glances that kept him from coming to believe that this was some sort of cruel joke. She did not seem intelligent enough to put on an act. Al got up at one point and put on a plaid wool shirt. Frank sat in numbness, an apathy born of fear. At last he admitted to himself that it was true, that no miracle would stop it, that he would very likely die–and that investigation would probably indicate a verdict of suicide rather than accident. It would be a small and unimportant death, the end of a life that to others would also seem small and unimportant.

If anything was to be done, he would have to do it. He felt a tingling of excitement, yet he was careful to maintain a look of docility, of the cowed little man. With so much at stake, any gamble was valid. No odds could be too great. He stopped thinking of fear, of death, of himself. He became acutely observant. Al was winning consistently, and jeered at Whitey. The bottle was nearly empty. They had stopped playing gin and they were playing poker for higher stakes. Stel had stopped playing.

Frank was in a poor position. He could not scramble to his feet quickly enough. There was nothing close to him that could serve as a weapon. He had half decided that his best chance was to scramble to his left, try to hit the light switch on his way toward the window. There would be no time to try to unlock the door. He was rehearsing the movements this would require when he saw Al shuffle. It was a clumsy shuffle. The liquor was taking hold. A card slipped unnoticed, by everyone but Frank, into Al's lap. Al was in profile to Frank. He could see the card. It rested on Al's thigh. Frank's angle

of vision was low enough, so that he could see that the card was an ace.

"You got more damn luck," Whitey said.

"Whitey!" Frank said sharply.

They all stared at him.

"Whitey, you're losing every hand. He's got an ace in his lap right now."

Al looked down. Whitey grunted and shoved the rickety card table aside. Al picked up the card and turned it over. It was the ace of hearts. Whitey made a low sound and plunged from the bed toward Al. Al moved backwards and the chair upset. Frank saw the gun come out of the hip pocket as he scrambled to his feet. Whitey had hold of the front of the plaid wool shirt and he was cursing loudly. The girl screamed and in the middle of the scream the gun went off. It made less noise than Frank had expected. It was like the cracking of a very brittle stick. As Whitey took two unsteady steps backwards, his face slack, and as the girl screamed again, Frank snatched up the fallen chair with quick coordination. Al started to spin around. He was nearly all the way around when Frank hit him with the chair. The chair did not shatter as do chairs in the movies. One leg struck Al solidly across the side of the head. He went down heavily. The gun spun around and around on the linoleum floor. Whitey fell at least three long seconds after Al had gone down.

By then Frank had the gun. The girl looked at him, her mouth working, her eyes wide and unfocused. She ran around him, sobbing. She fumbled with the key, unlocked the door. He followed her out, moving slowly. She was running up the hill. He heard the dying sound of her footsteps, heard her blundering through the brush. No one seemed to have heard the gun or the commotion, or perhaps no one had the desire to investigate.

He did not look back into the room. He walked down the hill. He slipped the gun into his side pocket. There were no customers in the diner. The fat man was wiping off the bar top. He looked at Frank with heavy annoyance. "I'm closed, bud."

"I'm going to use your phone."

"I told you I'm—well, okay. Go ahead. Make it short."

Frank straightened his shoulders, "I might talk a half hour." He was daring the man to oppose him. "That's going to be okay with you, isn't it?"

The man looked at him, shrugged, looked away. "Suit yourself."

He called the police. Then he made a collect call to Marian. Her voice was sleepy, but she soon began to understand. It was five hundred miles—one day's drive away. He hung up when he heard the approaching cry of the siren.

He walked out and waited for them. He knew that he would talk well and they would remember him.

Cop for a Day

The clothes were new, the man the same. Too bad certain people failed to recognize him.

BY HENRY SLESAR

THEY HAD eighteen thousand dollars, they couldn't spend a nickel. Davy Wyatt spread the money on the kitchen table, in neat piles, according to their various denominations, and just sat there, looking. After awhile this got on Phil Pennick's nerves.

"Cut it out, kid," the older man said. "You're just eatin' your heart out."

"Don't I know it."

Davy sighed, and swept the bills back into the neat leather briefcase. He tossed it carelessly onto his bunk, and joined it there a minute later, lying down with his fingers locked behind his head.

"I'm goin' out," Phil said suddenly.

"Where to?"

"Pick up some sandwiches, maybe

a newspaper. Take a little walk."

The kid's face paled. "Think it's a good idea?"

"You got a better one? Listen, we can rot in this crummy joint." Phil looked around the one-room flat that had been their prison for two days, and made a noise that didn't nearly show his full disgust. Then he grabbed for his jacket and put it on.

"It's your neck," the kid said. "Don't blame me if you get picked up. With that dame playin' footsie with the cops—"

"Shut up! If they get me, they'll have your neck in the chopper ten minutes later. So don't wish me any bad luck, pal."

Davy sat up quickly. "Hey, no kidding. Think you ought to take the chance?"

The older man smiled. The smile did nothing for the grim set of his features, merely shifted the frozen blankness, which was the result of three prison terms. He put a soft fedora on his gray head and adjusted it carefully.

"We took our chance already," he said as he opened the door. "And as far as the dame goes—you leave that up to me."

He hoisted the .38 out of his shoulder holster, checked the cartridges, and slipped it back. The gesture was so casual, so relaxed, that the kid realized once again that he was working with a pro.

Davy swallowed hard, and said, "Sure, Phil. I'll leave it up to you."

The street was full of children. Phil Pennick liked children, especially around a hideout. They discouraged rash action by the police. He walked along like a man out to get the morning paper, or a pack of cigarettes, or to shoot a game of pool. Nobody looked at him twice, even though his clothes were a shade better than anybody else's in that slum area.

Davy's last words were stuck in his thoughts. *"I'll leave it up to you . . ."* It was easy enough to reassure the kid that the old pro would work them out of trouble. Only this time, the old pro wasn't so sure.

They had planned a pretty sound caper. Something simple, without elaborate preparations. It involved one small bank messenger, from a little colonial-style bank in Brooklyn, the kind of messenger who never seemed to tote more than a few grand around. Only they had been doubly surprised. The bank messenger had turned out to be a scrapper, and the loot had turned out to be bigger than they had ever dreamed. Now they had the money, and the little bonded errand boy had two bullets in his chest. Was he dead or alive? Phil didn't know, and hardly cared. One more arrest and conviction, and he was as good as dead anyway. He wasn't made to be a lifer; he'd rather be a corpse.

But they had the money. That was the important thing. In twenty years of trying, Phil Pennick had

never come up with the big one.

It would have been a truly great triumph, if the cops hadn't found their witness. They hadn't seen the woman until it was too late. She was standing in a doorway of the side street where they had made their play. She was a honey blonde, with a figure out of 52nd Street, and a pair of sharp eyes. Her face didn't change a bit when Phil spotted her. She just looked back, coldly, and watched the bank messenger sink to the sidewalk with his hands trying to back the blood. Then she had slammed the front door behind her.

The kid had wanted to go in after her, but Phil said no. The shots had been loud, and he wasn't going to take any more chances. They had rushed into the waiting auto, and headed for the pre-arranged hideout.

Phil stopped by a newsstand. He bought some cigarettes, a couple of candy bars, and the Journal. He was reading the headlines as he walked into the tiny delicatessen adjoining. The holdup story was boxed at the bottom of the page. It didn't tell him anything he didn't already know. The honey blonde had talked all right. And she was ready to identify the two men who had shot and killed the bank's errand boy. *Shot and killed . . .* Phil shook his head. The poor slob, he thought.

In the delicatessen, he bought four roast beef sandwiches and a half dozen cans of cold beer. Then he walked back to the apartment, thinking hard.

As soon as he came in, the kid grabbed for the newspaper. He found the story and read it avidly. When he looked up, his round young face was frightened.

"What'll we do, Phil? This dame can hang us!"

"Take it easy." He opened a beer.

"Are you kidding? Listen, one of the first things the cops'll do is go looking for you. I mean—let's face it, Phil—this is your kind of caper."

The older man frowned. "So what?"

"So what? So they'll parade you in front of this dame, and she'll scream bloody murder. Then what happens to me?"

Phil took his gun out and began cleaning it. "I'll stop her," he promised.

"How? They probably got a million cops surrounding her. They won't take any chances. Hell no. So how can you stop her?"

"I got a plan," Phil said. "You're just going to have to trust me, kid. Okay?"

"Yeah, but—"

"I said trust me. Don't forget, Davy." He looked at his partner hard. "This wouldn't have happened at all—if you didn't have a jerky trigger finger."

They ate the sandwiches, drank the beer, and then the older man went to the leather brief case and

opened it. He lifted out a thin packet of bills and put it into his wallet.

"Hey," Davy said.

"Don't get in an uproar. I'm goin' to need a few bucks, for what I've got in mind. Until I come back, I'll trust you to take care of the rest." Phil put on his jacket again. "Don't get wild ideas, kid. Remember, you don't leave the room until I get back. And if we have any visitors—watch that itchy finger."

"Sure, Phil," the kid said.

Phil had a hard time getting a taxi. When he did, he gave the driver the Manhattan address of a garment house on lower Seventh Avenue.

There was a girl behind the frosted glass cage on the fifth floor, and she was pretty snippy.

"I want to see Marty Hirsch," Phil said.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Hirsch is in conference—"

"Don't give me that conference junk. Just pick up your little phone and tell him a good friend from Brooklyn Heights is here. He'll know who it is."

The girl's nose tilted up, but she made the call.

The man who hurried out to see Phil was short and paunchy. He was in shirtsleeves, and his sunset-colored tie was hanging loosely around his neck.

"Er, hello," he said nervously, looking towards the switchboard. "Look, Phil, suppose we can talk in the hallway? I got a customer inside."

"What's the matter, Marty? Ashamed of your friends?"

"Please, Phil!"

In the hallway, the garment man said: "Look, I told you never to come here." He wiped sweat from his face. "It doesn't look good, for both of us. We should do all our business by phone."

"You don't understand," Phil said. "I ain't got nothin' hot for you to buy. I'm out of that business, Marty."

"Oh? So what is it then?"

"I just want a little favor, Marty. For an old pal."

The small eyes narrowed. "What kind of favor?"

"You got a big uniform department. Right?"

"Yeah. So what? Army and Navy stuff. Things like that. So what do you want?"

"A uniform," Phil said easily. "That's all. A cop uniform. Only it's gotta be good."

"Now look, Phil—"

"Don't give me a hard time, Marty. We got too long a friendship. I want to play a joke on a friend of mine. You can fix me up with something, can't you?"

The garment man frowned. "I'll tell you what. I got here some stock models. Only they're not so new, and they ain't got no badges. And no gun, you understand."

"Don't worry about that. I got the potsy. Will this uniform pass? I mean, if another cop saw it?"

"Yeah, yeah, sure. It'll pass. I'm telling you."

"Swell. Then trot it out, Marty." The man looked doubtful, so Phil added: "For the sake of a friend, huh?"

Phil walked out into the street with the large flat box under his arm, feeling that he was getting somewhere. Then he waved a cab up to the curb, and gave him the cross streets where Davy Wyatt had killed the bank messenger.

It was chancey, but worth it. He didn't know whether the blonde was cooling her high heels in a police station, or just knee-deep in cops guarding her at her own apartment house.

He knew the answer the minute he stepped out of the cab. There was a police car parked at the opposite curb, and two uniformed patrolmen were gabbing near the front entrance of the blonde's residence.

He looked up and down the street until he found what he was looking for. There was a small restaurant with a red-striped awning. He walked up to it briskly, and saw it was called: ANGIE'S. He glanced at the menu pasted to the window, then pushed the door open.

He surveyed the room, and it looked good. The men's john was in a hallway out of the main dining room, and there was a side exit that would come in handy when he made the switch in clothing.

There weren't many customers. Phil took a table near the hall, and placed his package on the opposite chair. A bored waiter took his order. After being served, Phil chewed patiently on a dish of tired spaghetti. Then he paid his check and went into the john.

He changed swiftly, in a booth. Then he put the clothes he'd taken off inside the box and tied the string tight. He pinned the badge to his shirt, and dropped the .38 into the police holster.

Leaving by the side door, he dropped the box into one of the trash cans near the exit.

Then he crossed the street nonchalantly, headed straight for the apartment house.

"Hi," he said, to the two cops out front. "You guys seen Weber?" Weber was a precinct lieutenant that Phil knew only too well.

"Weber? Hell, no. Was he supposed to be here?"

"I thought so. I'm from the Fourth Precinct. We got a call from him awhile ago. We picked up somebody last night, on a B and E; might be one of the guys you're looking for."

"Search me," one of the cops said. "What do you want us to do about it?"

Phil swore. "I don't know what to do myself. Sendin' me on a wild

goose chase. He was supposed to be here by now."

"Can't help you, pal." The other cop yawned widely.

"Dame in her apartment?" Phil asked casually.

"Yeah," the second cop answered. "Lying down." He snickered. "I wouldn't mind sharing the bunk."

"Maybe I better talk to her. I got the guy's picture. Maybe she can tell me something."

"I donno." The first cop scratched his cheek. "We ain't heard nothing about that."

"What the hell," the second one said. He turned to Phil. "She's in Four E."

"Okay," Phil said. He started into the house. "If Weber shows up, you tell him I'm upstairs. Right?"

"Right."

He shut the door behind him, stood there long enough to let out a relieved sigh. Then he stepped into the automatic elevator, punched the button marked Four.

On the fourth floor, he rapped gently on the door marked E.

"Yeah?" The woman's voice sounded tired, but not scared. "Who is it?"

"Police," Phil said crisply. "Got a picture for you lady."

"What kind of a picture?" Her voice was close to the doorframe.

"Guy we picked up last night. Maybe the one we're lookin' for."

He could hear the chain being lifted; the door was opened. Close up, the blonde wasn't as young or as lush as he had imagined. She was wearing a faded housecoat of some shiny material, clutching it around her waist without too much concern for the white flesh that was still revealed.

Phil stepped inside and took off his cap. "This won't take long, lady." He closed the door.

She turned her back on him and walked into the room. He unbuttoned the holster without hurry, and lifted the gun out. When she turned around, the gun was pointed dead center. She opened her mouth, but not a sound came out.

"One word and I shoot," Phil said evenly. He backed her against a sofa, and shot a look towards the other room. "What's in there?"

"Bedroom," she said.

"Move."

She cooperated nicely. She stretched out on the bed at his command—and smiled coyly. She must have figured he wanted something else besides her death. Then he picked up a pillow and shoved it into her stomach.

"Hold that," he said.

She held it. Then he shoved the gun up against it and squeezed the trigger. She looked surprised and angry and deceived, and then she was dead.

The sound had been well muffled, but Phil wanted to be sure. He went to the window that faced the street and looked down. The two cops were still out front, chewing the fat complacently. He smiled,

slipped the gun into the holster, and went out.

The cops looked at him without too much interest.

"Well?" the first one said.

"Dames," Phil grinned. "Says she knows from nothing. Weber's gonna be awfully disappointed." He waved his hand. "I'm goin' back to the precinct. So long, guys."

They said, "So long," and resumed their gabbing.

Phil rounded the corner. There was a cab at the hack stand. He climbed into the back.

"What's up, officer?" the hackie grinned. "Lost your prowl car?"

"Don't be a wise guy." He gave him the address and settled back into a contented silence, thinking about the money.

It was dusk by the time he reached the neighborhood. He got off some four blocks from the tenement, and walked the rest of the distance. Some of the kids on the block hooted at him because of the uniform, and he grinned.

He went up the stairs feeling good. When he pushed open the door, Davy shot him once in the stomach. Phil didn't have time to make him realize the mistake he was making before the second bullet struck him in the center of his forehead.

STATEMENT

REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF MANHUNT, published monthly at New York, N. Y.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.; Editor, Walter R. Schmidt, 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.; Managing editor, William Manners, 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.; Business manager, Richard E. Decker, 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

2. The owner is: Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

3. The known stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of stock are: Michael St. John, 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.; Gertrude-Faye St. John, 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.; Richard E. Decker, 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.; Leo B. Mayer, 545 5th Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

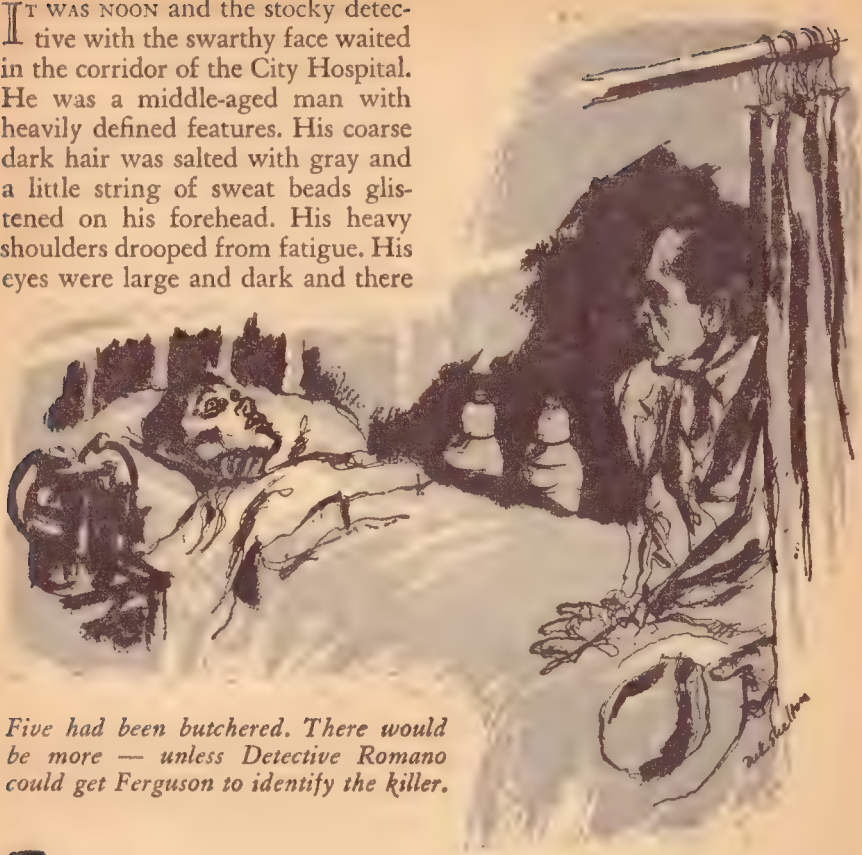
4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner.

RICHARD E. DECKER
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 9th day of September, 1956.

[SEAL] BLANCHE WADSWORTH, *Notary Public*
(My commission expires March 15, 1957.)

IT WAS NOON and the stocky detective with the swarthy face waited in the corridor of the City Hospital. He was a middle-aged man with heavily defined features. His coarse dark hair was salted with gray and a little string of sweat beads glistened on his forehead. His heavy shoulders drooped from fatigue. His eyes were large and dark and there



Five had been butchered. There would be more — unless Detective Romano could get Ferguson to identify the killer.

Face of Evil

BY DAVID ALEXANDER

was weary compassion in them as if they had looked upon the thousand faces of human life, neither with despair nor hope, but only with a patient acceptance. The whites of the eyes were filamented with bloody threads. He had not slept the night before. He had stayed on duty because the psychopathic killer the papers called The Butcher was loose again.

The detective's name was Ro-

mano. He was a lieutenant of Homicide, Manhattan West.

A doctor in a white coat came out of a nearby hospital room and closed the door after him. He was accompanied by a nurse. The nurse was dark and young and pretty and Romano thought of his own daughter who was a student at Marymount College. Romano rose slowly from the hard chair in the corridor, sighing with exhaustion. His feet had begun to throb and ache. That was always the first sign that his body was rebelling against the demands he made of it. Soon his nervous stomach would start acting up and he'd feel the painful little twinges of rising blood pressure. He was getting old. He would have to take his pension soon. Years ago he would have been driven and sustained by excitement, when a big squeal was this close to the break. He felt nothing like that now. He was just dead-tired.

The man in the hospital room was the only living person who could identify The Butcher, who had murdered five women and dismembered their bodies in a manner horrible enough to justify the name the papers had awarded him.

Romano lumbered slowly toward the doctor, his big feet slapping heavily on the rubber linoleum of the floor.

"Has he come out of it, Doc?" Romano asked.

The doctor was a thin man with high cheekbones and a small mustache. His slim, white fingers toyed with the stethoscope that dangled around his neck.

"He's out of coma, if that's what you mean," the doctor answered. "But he's hardly rational. I would say he's still suffering from shock. He has a heart condition, we've determined that. The experience he went through last night—well, it's a wonder he's alive under the circumstances. It might be better to wait awhile, Lieutenant."

Romano said, "It's pretty urgent, Doc. It's about as urgent as it can get. Time may mean a lot."

The doctor hesitated. The pretty nurse looked disapprovingly at Romand. She *does* look kind of like my daughter Ellie, Romano thought. She doesn't like me. Maybe she hates me, even, because she thinks I'm callous, that I want to torture a poor, sick man.

The doctor said, "I suppose you can go in for a little while, if you insist. But try to be considerate. Don't press him too much. You have to realize what he's been through."

Romano nodded. "I know," he said.

It sounded false, perhaps. But he did know. That was the tough part about being a cop. You saw all the violence and sadness and suffering there was and unless you were made of rock it became a part of you and you understood it and shared it. You understood afresh

each time you saw the wild anguish in a woman's face, each time you looked into a man's dazed eyes and saw his quivering lips.

The doctor drew aside, said, "Just a few minutes, then. A *very* few minutes, please."

Romano opened the door and walked into the hospital room. He closed the door behind him.

The man on the bed stared wide-eyed at the ceiling. His name was Lester Ferguson. The Butcher had murdered his wife the night before. Ferguson had found her body on the floor of their bedroom when he returned from choir practice.

Romano stood quietly by the bed for moment. The man did not even look at him.

Romano said, "Do you remember me, Mr. Ferguson?"

With an obvious physical effort, Ferguson turned his head toward the detective. He said, "I—I'm not quite sure."

"I'm a police officer, Mr. Ferguson. Lieutenant Romano, Homicide. I talked to you a moment last night at your house before you collapsed. You told me you saw his face. You said you could identify the man."

Ferguson's voice was a whisper. "The face," he said.

Romano waited. Ferguson said nothing else. He was off in a world of his own again.

"You told me you saw the murderer's face, Mr. Ferguson," Romano persisted. "When I asked you if you could identify it, you answered, 'Yes, yes, I will remember it forever.' It was right after that you became ill. Can you describe the face to me, Mr. Ferguson? I hate to do this. I know what you've been through. But this man is an insane killer. Your wife was the fifth woman he has killed. The same sadist, the same psychopath committed all the murders, because his method was always the same. He'll kill again, Mr. Ferguson, unless we find him first. And you're the only person on earth who can identify him."

Ferguson had drifted off again. Finally, he said, "The face."

"Yes, sir," said Romano eagerly. "The face you saw last night. The face at the window. Can you describe the face, Mr. Ferguson?"

Ferguson's voice was husky. "It—it was the Face of Evil," he said.

Romano sighed heavily and seated himself on the edge of a straight chair beside the bed.

"It was an evil face," he prompted. "Can you tell me a little more, Mr. Ferguson? Was it a young face or an old one? Was it broad or thin? Were there any scars or other distinguishing marks, perhaps?"

Ferguson said, "You cannot describe the Face of Evil in such terms."

Romano wiped the sweat beads from his face with the edge of his hand. Why were hospitals always such stuffy places? Sick people should have fresh air.

"Please try to help me, Mr. Ferguson," he pleaded patiently. "We'll have to have a little more than that to go on."

"What did you say your name was?" Ferguson asked.

"Romano. Lieutenant Romano. I'm a detective assigned to investigate the murder of your wife."

"Are you a religious man, Lieutenant?" Ferguson asked.

Romano winced. His wife Rosa and Father Riordan were always needling him about missing Mass. A cop's hours were so unpredictable. A cop got so damned tired.

"I believe in God, Mr. Ferguson," he said. "I'm a member of the church."

"All religious men have looked upon the face of God," Ferguson declared, his voice suddenly clear, animation coming into his dead-white face. "But how can you describe the face of God? You cannot describe the face of God as old or young or broad or thin or scarred or smooth."

The effort seemed to have exhausted the man on the bed. He fell back on the pillow, breathing heavily. Romano waited. Finally he said, "It was a human face you saw last night, Mr. Ferguson. You said you saw it staring at you through the window. It was the face of the man who murdered your wife."

Ferguson seemed exasperated at the detective's obtuseness. "Who can say if the Face of Evil is a human face?" he asked. "I mean no blasphemy, but it is like the face of God, because it is so many things. It is the face of a wanton woman who waits in shadows. It is the face of a soldier who is killing his enemy. It is the face of a maniac who runs amok with a flaming torch. It is the broad, red face of a lecherous sot who mouths obscenities. And it is the pinched, white face of a narcotics addict. Does that answer you? The Face of Evil is all these things."

Romano said, "Then it wasn't the face of a person you saw last night. It wasn't a real face, after all."

Ferguson lurched upright in the bed. His voice rose to shrill hysteria and Romano glanced apprehensively toward the closed door. "Of course it was real! It was a murderer's face. It was the face of the man who killed my wife!"

Romano sighed. He decided to try another tack. The doctor or the nurse would be in any second to tell him that his time was up.

"About the window, Mr. Ferguson," he said, consulting scribbled notes. "Your apartment is on the first floor. There is a bedroom window that opens on the little garden. It is quite probable the murderer entered and left through the window. It was not locked. But you told us you stood in the bedroom doorway and saw the face in the window directly opposite you. You were mistaken there, weren't you, Mr. Ferguson? There is no

window directly opposite the doorway. The window is some fourteen feet to the right of the door. You would have to walk into the room, past your wife's body, and turn to the right to see the window. You were a little confused on this point. Under the circumstances, that is understandable."

"No! No!" Ferguson exclaimed. "I came home from the church. I was feeling ill. I have been having these little spells. It is my heart, they say. I sank down into a chair, exhausted. I tried to call my wife. I wanted the medicine in the bathroom cabinet. She did not answer. I must have dozed off, lost consciousness. When I came to, I called my wife again. She did not answer. I opened my bedroom door. Her body was there at my feet, with the knife beside it. I looked up and there was a window directly above my wife's body, directly opposite the door, and the naked Face of Evil was staring at me through the window."

Romano said, "I see." The door was opening quietly. The nurse had come to summon him. He said, "Thank you, Mr. Ferguson. I hope I haven't tired you. We'll talk again when you are feeling better."

Romano nodded politely to the nurse and left the room. He had learned never to hope too much when a break was in the making. Now he was not too disappointed. He had to work on the theory that Ferguson had actually seen a face, because that was the only possible lead to the madman who had butchered five women. When Ferguson's mind cleared he might be able to describe the face in recognizable terms. He might be able to go over the mug shots of the hundreds of psychopaths in the I. D. room and pick out one and say, "That is the face." Romano had to hold to that. The Butcher had killed five times in seven months. He would kill again if they failed to find him.

Romano returned to Manhattan West, the old precinct house on the edge of Hell's Kitchen that was the clearing house for all the crimes of violence committed west of Fifth Avenue. He mounted a flight of worn stairs and entered the cubbyhole that served him as an office. A green-shaded bulb burned above the desk night and day, for no light came through the small window on an air-shaft. A large, young detective named Grierson, Romano's assistant, lay sleeping on the cracked leather couch. Grierson was a detective first-grade, which meant he drew lieutenant's pay, even though he did not have the permanent rank on the Department rolls. And he's only been a cop for seven years, Romano thought. Grierson was the new type of cop. He had been graduated from City College and on his nights off he studied law at N. Y. U. Romano sank down in the creaking swivel chair and sighed heavily. He reached down and loosened the laces of his shoes.

As he had expected, his nervous stomach was acting up. He took a small bottle of soda tablets from a drawer, shook out two. He poured water from a thermos jug on the desk and swallowed the tablets.

Grierson awakened and sat up on the couch, smoothing down his black hair with a big hand. He hadn't been to bed either, since The Butcher's latest kill had broken. Grierson yawned and said, "How is it?"

"My feet hurt," Romano answered.

Grierson said, "Did Ferguson come to? Did he identify The Butcher?"

Romano covered his mouth with his hand and belched. He said, "Ferguson came to. I talked to him a few minutes. He says he saw a face that wasn't human staring at him through a window that isn't there."

"One of those," said Grierson.

"We've got to believe it," Romano replied. He was trying to convince himself, not Grierson. "We've got to believe he saw The Butcher's face. Later on he may remember and tell us something we can work on. He's got a heart condition. He had a slight stroke when he got home last night, the medics say. When he came out of it and saw the body, his mind was fogged. He thinks the window was directly opposite the door. It isn't. But he could have stepped around the body, turned right and seen the face there in the only window. We've got to keep on thinking he did."

"The lab finished with the knife," said Grierson. "It adds up to nothing. The fingerprints were only smudges."

Romano nodded glumly. "Like usual," he said. "I've been on the force since you were playing hopscotch. In all that time I've seen just one murder solved by fingerprints. The murderer was considerate He left his prints in a pot of jeweler's wax."

Grierson said, "The poop on Ferguson is on your desk. Top folder. I looked it over. He's a solid citizen. Nobody had a word to say against him. Manages a book store on lower Fifth Avenue that sells Bibles and religious stuff. He's a pillar of the church. All his neighbors and his clergyman and the shopkeepers he deals with had a good word to say for him. He met his wife at his church. They've been married six years. No children."

"That's all?" Romano asked.

"Not quite," said Grierson. "He was a student at a Divinity College when the war broke out. He wanted to be a minister. He could have been deferred from the draft, but he enlisted in a combat unit. He was an infantryman. He was with Clark's Fifth Army all the way up The Boot. His record was good. Bronze Star decoration. Made staff sergeant. Was wounded slightly and got a Purple Heart. He was hospitalized a long time. It wasn't

the wound. He also suffered battle shock or combat fatigue or whatever it was they called it."

"That means he's a nut?" Romano asked. "It means he might see faces in windows that aren't there?"

Grierson shrugged and yawned again. "Not unless a couple of million other guys who are walking the streets are nuts," he answered. "There were at least that many cases of combat fatigue during the war, I understand. It's a temporary breakdown of the nervous system, that's all."

"Thanks, Grierson," Romano said. Sometimes he resented these new cops, the eager-beaver kind who had college degrees and studied law in night school. But they were useful. Romano hated to wade through long reports and Grierson knew it. Grierson could type with all ten fingers. He did most of the clerical poop that was part of a cop's job. Romano hated to peck at the typewriter with two thick fingers. He always made mistakes. After doing it for more than twenty years, he made mistakes.

The lieutenant began to skim through the report on Ferguson. He didn't read it carefully. He could depend on Grierson. Suddenly he paused and his thick eyebrows knit together.

"He was in that vet's place right over on Staten Island," he said.

Grierson said, "That's right. Bay Heaven. It's one of the biggest Army general hospitals in the country."

"Get your hat," Romano said. Romano was tying his shoe laces.

"Why?" asked Grierson.

"We're going over to Staten Island," Romano answered. "There just might be some medic still around who remembers Ferguson."

Grierson rose and stretched. "Oh, well," he said, "its a nice day for a ferry ride."

They left the police car parked on the lower deck of the ferry and climbed up to the top. They stood by the rail, letting the wind whip their faces, watching the skyline of Manhattan recede into the distance. More than eight million people lived and worked and had their being in this immediate area, Romano thought. One of them was called The Butcher.

"I wish I had some easy job," the lieutenant said aloud. "Like finding a needle in a haystack."

It took nearly two hours of questioning and waiting and checking the files at the hospital before they found a doctor named Bowers. He was an elderly man with the rank of lieutenant-colonel. After he had glanced over the files he remembered Lester Ferguson among the thousands of patients who had been under his care during the last dozen years. He remembered him quite clearly.

"A most interesting case," Bowers said. "His wound was comparatively trivial, a fragment of shell in the

leg that required surgery, but did no permanent damage. He didn't even limp as a result. But he was in shock for an incredible length of time. Weeks, months, even. Sometimes he would lapse into a catatonic state. He would lie there on his cot, his body rigid, staring wide-eyed at the ceiling. And he would murmur something in a kind of awed and frightened whisper. 'The face,' he'd say, 'the face.' He'd murmur that over and over again.

"It was trauma, of course, some shocking experience that had been repressed and had made a lasting impression on him. We couldn't bring out what it was or when it had occurred. It might have been in his childhood. It might have been anything and it might have happened at any time. I always say a thing like that is a splinter under the skin of the mind. You have to extract it somehow. We tried various techniques. None of them seemed to work. Finally, we hit on sodium pentothal, the stuff the newspapers call truth serum. I doubt we'd use it now we have the new relaxing drugs, but it did the trick. When he was under the influence of the drug we questioned him, and we finally brought it out, removed the splinter, you might say.

"He'd seen a face, or thought he'd seen one, staring at him through a broken window during street fighting while they were mopping up some little town in Italy. He thought it was the Face of Evil, as he called it. It must have been a pretty horrible experience for him. He was wounded right afterward, but the face stayed in his mind. Once we got him to tell us about it, we purged the thing and he was on his way to recovery."

"You think he saw a real face in the window?" Romano asked. "Or was it just some sort of delusion?"

The doctor shrugged. "It's hard to say," he answered. "It could have been a real face. It could have been the face of some enemy sniper trapped there in a ruined building. The street was piled with dead and dying men, probably. Such faces aren't very pretty. Whatever it was he saw, he thought it was the Face of Evil. He called it that. You have to understand that Ferguson was a very religious man. He'd been studying for the ministry when he went into the Army. Killing is a terrible experience for any man. That was especially true for a man like Ferguson. Most soldiers go through a war never knowing for sure that the shots they fire have killed an enemy. Ferguson knew for sure. Just a few days before he was wounded, a few days before he saw the face, he'd been decorated for wiping out an enemy strongpoint with a grenade. Five machine-gunners were killed by the grenade."

"And when you brought it out, when you made him tell you about the face—this Face of Evil—he was cured?" Romano asked.

"From the clinical view, he was," Bowers answered. "He came out of shock. The catatonic periods did not recur. We kept him around awhile for observation. He was perfectly normal when he was discharged."

"Ferguson saw the face again last night," Romano said flatly.

Bowers said, "I'm sorry. That is bad, of course, but it happens sometimes, years later. Usually it's some shattering experience that brings it on."

"It was a shattering experience," Romano told the doctor. "Ferguson's wife was killed by a murderer they call The Butcher."

The Lieutenant rose and nodded to Grierson. He was ready to leave.

As the police car rolled off the ferry onto Manhattan Island, Grierson said, "It's nearly five. Do we knock off now and catch some shuteye, or are we starting another tour of duty?"

"Drive to City Hospital," Romano answered. "I want to try and talk to Ferguson again."

Inside the hospital, Romano saw the same doctor he had spoken to that morning, the thin man with the high cheekbones and the small mustache.

"I'd like to talk to Ferguson again," he said. "I won't be but a little while."

The doctor said, "Didn't you get our message, Lieutenant?"

"What message?" Romano asked.

"We called your office and left word. Lester Ferguson died of a cerebral hemorrhage about an hour ago."

Romano merely nodded, accepting it.

Grierson shook his head angrily. "So the only person who could tell us what The Butcher looked like died without identifying him," the young detective said.

"Oh, he identified him," Romano answered softly. "Come on, Grierson. I want to look in on Ferguson's flat."

The Fergusons had occupied the ground floor of a house of mellowed brick on a pleasant, tree-lined street in Greenwich Village. Romano got the key of Ferguson's apartment from the superintendent. Daylight still showed through the windows, but the apartment was shadowy and Romano switched on lights.

He said, "Ferguson must have been sitting in that chair right there when he came back to consciousness after his stroke." He crossed the room and sat down in a chintz-covered easy chair.

"He came to," Romano continued. "He was confused. He probably wasn't too sure where he was, even. He called to his wife, and she didn't answer."

Romano got to his feet. "The bedroom door was closed. Fergus-

on walked toward it." Romano walked toward the bedroom door and opened it. He switched on another light, stood in the doorway.

"He looked down and saw his wife's body on the floor, right inside the doorway. Then he looked up and saw the murderer's face staring at him through a window."

Romano drew aside, "Come over here, Grierson," he said. "Stand here in the doorway."

Grierson obeyed.

"Look straight ahead of you," Romano said. "You see, Ferguson was right. There is a window."

Grierson was a good cop and a conscientious one, but sometimes his mind did not work too fast. He turned to Romano, his face blank.

Romano said, "You want me to draw you a picture? Ferguson saw the face of the man who killed his wife in what he called a window, the thing that's right in front of you. He called it The Face of Evil, but it was The Butcher's face, the face of the psycho who killed five women in this neighborhood."

Grierson didn't see a window.

All he saw was his own face reflected in the mirror on the wall.

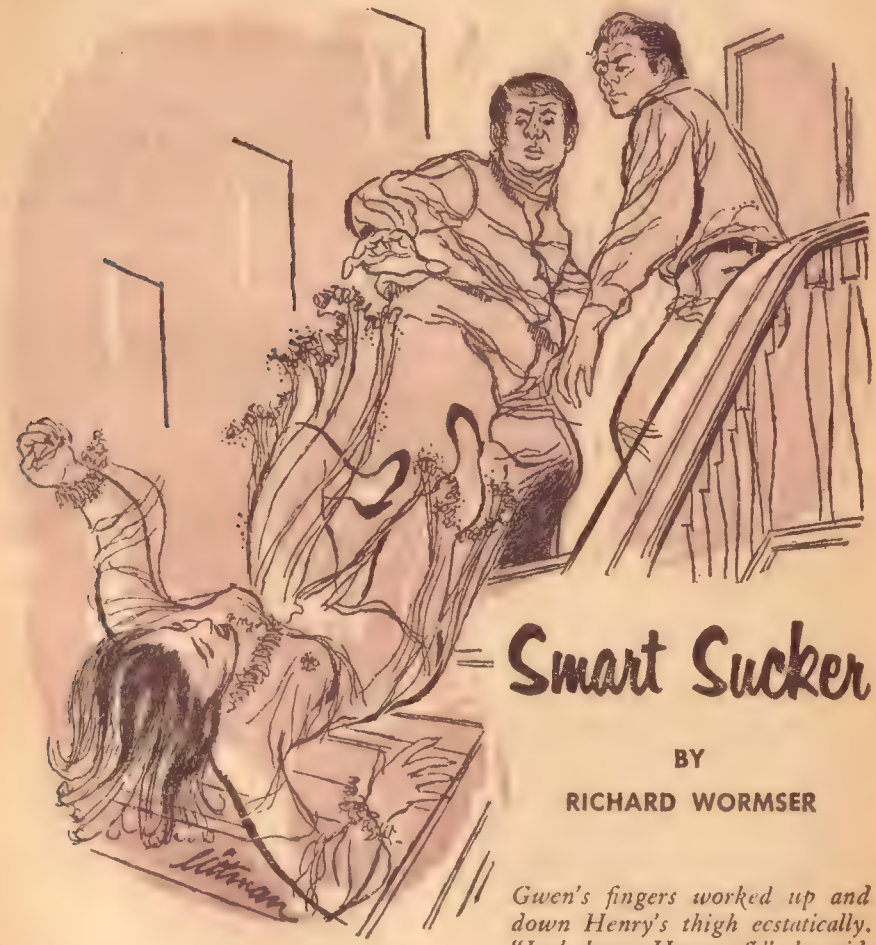
In Chicago, two federal agents worked for six months, posing as be-bop fans and enduring be-bop language, before they succeeded in getting Willie Hill, 32, to sell them five ounces of heroin. After his arrest, Hill, in a statement, said: "I'm real down about this. Here I thought those cats were the coolest, but they turned out to be nowhere"

Woodrow Elerke, an Albuquerque, N. M. cosmetics salesman, ran out of gasoline a short distance from a service station. He walked to the station and got a can full of gas, but when he arrived back at his car he found that his sample case had been stolen. Then he found that he needed a funnel and returned to the station. When he got back to the car the gas was gone.

Josefina Martinez, Mexico City, sued for divorce from her convict husband, Fernando, because of his criminal record. The action was filed from the women's penitentiary where she had been serving a sentence that began the day of their marriage.

HE WENT, a guy determined to make two more calls before the end of office hours, along the dark and dirty street. Torn newspapers and empty cigarette packages skittered along the gutter, and a lean black cat, not quite mangy, scuttled up a narrow alleyway.

When he raised his head to see if he was anywhere near number 1262, the Merser Printing Company, the damp wind caught the brim of his new hat and he slapped a quick hand on the crown to hold



Smart Sucker

BY

RICHARD WORMSER

Gwen's fingers worked up and down Henry's thigh ecstatically. "Let's bump Henry off," she said. "We don't need him any more."

it down. The wind was strong enough to make the briefcase in his other hand a problem.

His name was Henry Croft, he sold office supplies, and he believed that hard work, a neat appearance and attention to his customers' individual needs would some day make him rich. He had a wife, one and seven-ninths children, lived in the suburbs—though not in as good a house as he someday hoped to own—and was generally considered a pretty good guy.

He did not belong in a place like this Slack Street except to pass through, selling a few typewriter ribbons and maybe a filing case or two. Which was why he was here.

Now, raindrops began to fall, big, idle ones that rolled in the dust of Slack Street without breaking. A frugal guy, he thought first of the new hat, the newly-pressed suit. He stepped into a doorway.

Then the rain changed, became the kind in which the drops are small and driven hard; the lasting kind of rain. He shifted the briefcase to his other hand and looked around.

Through unwashed windows neon ads for a couple of breweries shone at him from across the street. A bar, but one so lowly that it didn't have a name—just BAR & GRILL in letters that might have been born gilt on a once-black background.

Waiting for the wind to slacken for a second, he made the dash across the street toward the neon.

As he made it into the bar, the wind took the heavy door away from him and slammed it shut. He gave the apologetic smile of an intruder.

Nobody smiled back at him.

There were six people in the bar, counting the bartender; four men, two women. Or rather, four boys and two girls; all of them had the unlined faces of the early twenties, despite their late-forty eyes.

Bubbles chased themselves endlessly around the brightly-lit rim of the juke box, out of rhythm with the rock-and-roll number that was playing.

Henry Croft laid his briefcase on a stool, wiped it with his handkerchief and then carefully placed his hat on the dried surface. He told the bartender: "Scotch on the rocks."

The bartender gave his dark hair an unnecessary slicking with both palms, and said: "I don't read you, Mac."

"Scotch whiskey and ice. No water, no soda."

"Whyn't you say so?"

Henry Croft perched himself on the stool next to his hat and case. The young man on his right smelled slightly sweaty and more than slightly pomaded. The girl beyond him languidly pulled up her skirt and scratched a dead-white thigh. The bartender slapped an old-fashioned glass in front of Henry Croft and waited for a

dollar bill; he threw a quarter back in exchange.

The wind shifted and rain slashed viciously against the windows.

The scotch had never crossed salt water; its oil clung to his tongue, its peculiarly acrid aroma went up his nose and made him feel like he'd slept all night in a freshly-painted room.

The juke box stopped and one of the old-young men pushed away from the bar and languidly dropped another nickel in. The same record started; nobody seemed to be listening.

The bartender said: "Think he's a cop, Juney?"

Juney was the one who'd nickelled the machine. He said: "We'll find out." He ambled slowly toward Henry Croft, without looking at him. Even with Henry, Juney swept the briefcase and hat off onto the floor, and slouched down on the stool they had occupied. He said: "Beer."

When the bottle had been opened and the beer poured, he tasted it and said: "Naw, Carley. He's no cop." He smiled at Henry Croft between them. "Pick up your hat, man. What you so scared of?"

The one named Carley said: "That's a good hat, man. Too good to lay on the floor."

Henry Croft bent slowly and retrieved the hat and briefcase. The back of his neck ached all the time he was bent over, expecting the rabbit punch, the thin knife blade, the unknown. But nothing happened.

Juney said: "Drink your drink. You'll hurt Carley's feelings."

Henry Croft picked up the glass. It was nearly to his mouth when the girl reached over and knocked it out of his hand. The bad whiskey, the ice, the glass itself rolled down the front of his suit. The girl laughed. "Change seats with me, Juney. I like this square."

Carley began to laugh. It was a funny laugh, without humor, or friendship behind it. "Watch yourself, mister," he said. "When Gwen gets hot, she sizzles."

Juney slid out of his seat, and the girl slid over. She put her hand on Henry Croft's shoulder and slowly slid it down his arm until she could grab his wrist. Her hand was stronger than it looked; she had a pasty, sickly complexion. She was about twenty. "You got a name?"

"Henry."

"Buy me a drink, Henry. I'm Gwen."

He nodded at Carley. The bartender grinned, and poured a straight shot for Gwen, threw something on top of ice for Henry. The girl knocked her drink down in a single swallow, and moved her hand from Henry's wrist to his thigh. "What you want in here, Henry?"

He had to clear his throat twice before he could speak. "A drink.

To get out of the rain," he said.

Gwen laughed her flat laugh again. "Oh boy. Some rain."

It didn't make any sense. Henry Croft grabbed his glass, and this time Gwen let him swallow the oily stuff. She caressed his thigh gently. "You like me, Henry?"

"Sure, Gwen. Sure."

Carley said: "That'll be a buck-fifty, mister."

Henry Croft took his wallet from his hip pocket. He laid two dollar bills on the bar, and started to put the wallet away. Gwen reached out and took the wallet from him and shoved it down the front of her dress. "You want to treat me right, don't you, Henry?"

He pulled away from her and then lunged at the point of her V-neck. Just as his fingers touched the cloth, Juney hit him on the jaw. He went back against the bar, and Carley brought a bottle down on his head, and he was quiet. Black and quiet.

When he came to he was in a car. It was still raining; almost the first thing he knew was the sweep and swish of the windshield wipers. He moaned and felt his head, confusedly; he had no idea where he was or why he was here, or how he'd gotten there.

Then the whole business of the bar came back to him. Carley, the bartender, was driving, and the girl Gwen was next to him, on the front seat. She had turned around. She said: "Juney, he's moving."

Juney's voice came from next to him, out of the shadows. "Let him move. If he gets too lively, I'll sock him again."

Henry Croft lost all desire to move. He even held his breath until he felt his eyes bugging. Then he let his wind out with a deep hissing, and Juney laughed. "He's being a good boy," Juney said. "He's even trying not to breathe."

"You can breathe, sucker," Gwen said. "Help yourself. It won't be for long."

"Shut up," Carley said.

The car went along in the rain; Henry Croft didn't recognize any of the streets they twisted through. The district was residential, though, and he didn't know any of the suburbs except his own.

Then Carley said: "There they are," and started slowing down. "It's Paul," he said.

Henry Croft could see him, one of the young men from the bar, standing in the rain, waving his arms. Carley turned the car in behind another, following Paul's directions, and stopped with his front bumper against the rear one of the parked car.

Juney said: "Watch my sucker," and got out of the car. He went ahead and got in behind the wheel of the parked sedan, and then disappeared, as though crouching under the dashboard. Gwen twisted around in the front seat, and said: "I'm watching you, Henry."

Juney reappeared, and waved his hand. Carley let the car go forward in low gear, and Juney's car went ten or twenty feet along the wet pavement. Then Juney waved his hand again, and Carley cut the motor. Paul came out of the rain, and opened the back door. "Out, sucker. It won't be long now." He reached in and prodded Henry Croft, who climbed out, stiffly.

The rain felt good on his battered head.

Carley climbed out and took up a post on Henry Croft's other side. He and Paul half pulled him to the front car. "Let's move out," Paul said. "Even without the starter, sometimes these car-loving citizens wake up when they hear their own motor."

This time Carley got in the back seat with Henry Croft. He lounged back in the corner, reaching under his coat. He took out a gun, balanced it loosely in his hand, grinning at Henry Croft. In the front seat Gwen suddenly laughed, and said: "Oh, cut it out, Paul."

Carley said: "Know what this is, Henry?"

Henry Croft nodded.

"Well, then, tell me." Carley waited a minute, and when Henry didn't speak, he suddenly lashed out with the pistol, rapping the sights into Henry Croft's belly. "Speak up, sucker."

Henry Croft gulped air with difficulty, and said: "A gun."

Carley nodded wisely, while Gwen told Paul: "That hurts, damnit." But she laughed.

Carley said: "Kids. Can't keep their hands off a dame . . . Yeah, Henry, this is a gun. You know what a gun does?" Again he waited.

Henry said: "It shoots people."

Carley gave his schoolmaster nod again. "Yeah. A gun. And it shoots people. Dead. So does Paul's gun, so does Juney's . . . You gotta gun, Gwen?"

Gwen said: "If I did, I'd murder this Paul," still laughing.

"Kids," Carley said again. "Always I got to work with kids. So Gwen doesn't have a gun. So there will be only three guns. You ever have eighteen holes in you?"

Henry shook his head. Then, remembering, he said: "No, I never did."

Carley said: "Well, then, I suppose you don't know how that feels. Well, to tell you the truth, neither do I. But I can guess, and a smart sucker like you, you can guess, too. So maybe you'll do what we tell you to. Do you think you will?"

Henry Croft said: "Yes. Of course I will."

"A smart sucker," Carley said again, and then was silent while the car went around some more corners and through a little park and out again, the water splashing sidewise from the wheels and the windshield wipers squeaking slightly. The wipers on the first

car had not squeaked like this.

Then they stopped, and Juney turned the headlights off and said: "This is the place, folks. The sucker know what he's to do, Carley?"

"No," Carley said, "but he'll do it. He's a very nice sucker." He laughed. "Listen, Henry. It's easy. All you do is go up to that house, see there, and ring the bell. Talk nice to them, Henry. They got a heavy chain on the door. Get them to open it."

Paul said: "Supposing he tells them to call the cops?"

"Why, I guess he will," Carley said. "That's about the quickest way I know to get people to open doors. Who wouldn't trust a sucker who's calling copper?"

Paul said: "I don't like it. I like things simple."

Carley said: "Now he tells me. My strong silent pal. Okay. You go up there. Give them a nice simple look at your face. It'll make them happy. Or maybe wear your mask. People always open doors for guys with masks on. Especially at night. Especially a guy who's got a payroll in the house."

Paul said: "Okay, okay."

Carley said: "So now you know, Henry. Get going."

Henry opened the door of the car. He did it slowly, thinking: *Now my fingerprints are on a stolen car,* and knowing, even while he thought it, that it was a silly thought. His shoes squished across the pavement, and he felt lonesome and chilled and sick. *I'll get pneumonia out of this,* he thought, and remembering what Carley had said about the eighteen holes, that was pretty silly too.

Now he was at the steps, four of them, leading up to a little porch, sheltered over so a person wouldn't get wet waiting for the door to be opened. Lawn on either side of the walk and the steps, nice little house, dark, not a light showing. He took a deep breath and pressed the doorbell. The ringing in the depth of the house was shockingly loud.

He stood there, thinking he was going to be sick to his stomach, was going to faint. Instead, he sneezed. He thought he heard an abrupt movement close to him in the night air when he made the involuntary noise; but he couldn't be sure. Then he pressed the bell-button again.

A light came on in the hall, a voice said: "All right, all right," and a peephole opened in the door. All he could see was a bushy brow and the bleary eye of a freshly-disturbed sleep, but the voice was masculine and angry: "What do you want?"

"I've been — call the police," Henry Croft said.

The peephole closed then, and there was the noise of the door being unlocked. But it opened only a crack, and there was a heavy chain, brassily shining, that clinked. "Man, you're beat up," the voice

inside the house said. It belonged, Henry could see now, to a burly man in ridiculously bright blue striped pajamas. "What happened to you?"

"Hold up," Henry said. "Taken for a ride. I—"

"All right," the burly man said. "Sit on the porch out there. I'll phone the cops."

The guns in the night were real. If this door closed in his face, he'd be shot. Eighteen holes. Again his mind veered away into ridiculousness, shrinking from the reality of death, and a silent bar from the song *Sixteen Tons* came back to him.

But he knew what he had to do. He flung himself forward, clawing at the edge of the open door, risking having the heavy wood crush his fingers against the frame. "Let me in. For God's sake, they might come back."

The big man hesitated. "I can't —aw, hell, all right. You'll die out there, and you don't look like you could hurt me."

More noise, the noise of the chain being slid out of the slot that held it, then the door opened a little more, and a blue-striped arm shot out to jerk Henry into the house, shut the door quickly.

It didn't work. Bodies hit Henry Croft from behind, forcing him and the door and the burly man all to swing back into the hall in confusion; then feet were running outside, and more bodies jammed into the mess, and then the door was closed, and the little entry hall was filled with guns and masked faces and terror.

A purple mask said: "You're Joe Wheeler."

The burly man said: "So what?"

Upstairs a female voice called: "Joe, Joe what is it?" and the purple mask made a gesture. Two of the masked men started up the stairs. Henry thought they were Paul and Juney, but he couldn't be sure. It didn't matter.

From behind a black silk mask, Carley's voice said: "You done well, Henry." The voice laughed nastily. "Somebody give Henry a gun. He done well."

The third man left in the hall had on a white silk mask, ornamented with sequins; something for a lady in evening dress to wear to a dance. He pushed a gun into Henry's hands, said: "Help cover Mr. Wheeler there, Henry."

Wheeler looked at Henry and said: "You had me fooled. You sure had me fooled." Henry Croft had never been spoken to with such enmity in his life.

He said: "But I—" and a gun barrel slashed his ribs from behind.

Purple Mask said again: "You're Joe Wheeler. You're running a little construction job out here. Today you drew your payroll from the bank in the city; you don't pay off till tomorrow. So the money's here in the house."

"Out at the shack," Joe Wheeler

said. "I left it on the job."

"Yeah?" Purple Mask didn't sound convinced. "You believe that, Henry?"

Henry said: "I—" but Purple Mask had raised his voice. "Hurry it up there. You guys ain't here to play around." He bowed to Joe Wheeler. "Very playful guys."

Joe Wheeler said nothing. He seemed to have settled down to a policy of quietly hating Henry Croft.

Paul and Juney came down the stairs again. They had a woman between them, a woman about thirty, not bad looking despite her lack of makeup, pretty good figure, with nothing over it but a thin nightgown.

"They wouldn't let me get a robe, Joe," she said.

"Don't worry, lady, we got girls of our own," Carley said. "Where's the money, Joe Wheeler?"

"On the job," Wheeler said. "In the shack."

"Let her go, boys," Purple mask said.

On the stairs, Paul and Juney paused, then they pushed, together, and Mrs. Wheeler came down to the hall, fast. She landed on her knees, hands scrabbling on the floor to break her fall. One breast came out of the top of the nightgown, and Joe Wheeler groaned a little.

Paul and Juney followed her down, slowly. She started to rise, and Carley took his foot and pushed her down on the floor, lightly. "The money," he said.

Joe Wheeler said: "Guys, I—"

Carley leaned forward, putting his weight on the foot that pinned Mrs. Wheeler to the floor. His eyes glittered through the mask, watching Joe Wheeler. Mrs. Wheeler screamed once, as Carley's other foot came up off the floor.

"In the kitchen," Joe Wheeler said. "The flour bin."

Carley put both feet on the floor. "Show us, sucker."

Wheeler went away, Carley following him. Paul and Juney stood at the foot of the stairs, looking down at the half-naked woman, looking up at Henry Croft. Paul bent forward and looked at Mrs. Wheeler more closely. "Not bad," he said. "For a rainy night."

"Cut it out," Purple Mask said. "Cut it out." He had never taken his eyes off Henry Croft.

"She's too old, anyway," Juney said. "She's stiff in the joints, aren't you, lady?" He cleared his throat, spat on the floor, near the woman.

"You can get up now," Purple Mask said. "If we need you anymore, it'll be easy to put you back down."

Carley came back alone. His hands and the cuffs of his coat were white with flour. The rain in his sleeves was caking it. He carried a sack of something or other; he slapped it against the newel post, and flour whitened the air. Mrs. Wheeler was getting to her knees. Her hands shakingly adjusted the

lace V around her breasts. "Where is he? Where's Joe?"

Carley said: "Who told you to get up?" and the money sack whirled in his hands. It landed across the back of the woman's neck and she fell back down to the floor, hard. Henry thought he heard the bones in her nose break, but he couldn't be sure, because Carley was looking at him now. "I slapped the old man down," he said.

"He's in the kitchen, but he ain't cooking. Let's roll."

Henry Croft stepped aside to let them—in God's name—roll. Roll out of the house, out of the street, out of his life. But Carley made a gesture with his gun. "Out, Henry."

They had made a very good boy of him. He went out. Out into the cold, the dreary, but not the lonesome rain. He had plenty of company.

Gwen was behind the wheel of the second car, now. Carley motioned Henry into the right-hand front seat, slid behind the wheel, crowding Gwen over against Henry. He dropped the flour-stained sack into Gwen's lap.

Other guys jumped into the back, they took off fast; Gwen had kept the motor running. Henry leaned back against the cushions, shivering.

Gwen's hand was back on his thigh. She was breathing hard. "That was kicks," she said. "That was joy, way up. Ohhhh." She let out her breath in a long sigh.

Carley said, as he had said before: "Kids. I gotta work with kids. Bopsters . . . Henry!"

Henry said: "Yes?"

"We gonna have to bump you off, Henry?"

Gwen's fingers worked up and down Henry's thigh ecstatically. "Let's," she said. "Let's bump Henry off, Carley. We don't need him any more."

"Shut up," Carley said. "You had your kicks for the night, Gwen . . . Henry, while you were out, we went through your wallet. We know you, we know where you live. Pictures in the wallet, a wife, a kid."

"Squares," Gwen said.

Carley said: "Give him back the wallet, Gwen. You can keep the money."

She said: "I want the pictures. For my album." But Carley growled, and she reached into her bra, got the leather out, slipped out the money and gave Henry the wallet. Then she put her hand back on him.

"Leave him alone," Carley said. "Henry, we're letting you out. Near your house. You know Polacks, Henry, Polish people?"

"Some," Henry said.

"They got a custom. They prop stiffs up in their coffins, and take pictures of them. That's the kind of snapshots you'll be carrying if you talk, Henry."

He skidded the car around a

corner, then another one. "You get me, Henry?"

Henry Croft said: "Yes."

Gwen said: "Ah, the river, Carley. In the river with him. We could tie the car jack to his feet." Her busy hand dug in.

Carley said: "I'm gonna ditch you someday, Gwen. And Juney on accounta you. You got no business sense. We're cool now. Kill this mark, and we're not."

"I like being hot," Gwen said simply. "It's living, when you're hot."

Carley slid the car to a stop, silently, expertly. "Out, Henry. You'll keep your mouth buttoned. A guy away from home all day, a salesman, with a wife. And a kid. You'll keep right on being good, Henry, like you was all evening."

Henry opened the door. He was sure it couldn't be over, that the nightmare wasn't ending, that there'd be a shot from the car, a blackjack out of the night. But all that happened was Gwen's taunting voice drifting back to him: "You didn't kiss me good night, Hen-ry—" and then they were gone.

Gone to some unknown rendezvous, where they'd ditch the cars, back to the bar on Slack Street. . . One street he'd never walk down any more, one neighborhood he'd avoid. The Merser account would have to go unserviced, some other company could have that business.

Thinking about the Merser account, thinking about business brought him back to reality a little. He looked around. He wasn't more than three blocks from his home.

Excitement died in him, and so did the last tail-ends of his energy. The three blocks were endless, and later he couldn't have said if he'd walked them in the rain, or if the downpour had stopped.

Then he was on his own porch, fumbling at the lock with his own key, a little surprised that the key had been in his pocket all this time, but home. He got into the hall, and he closed the door after him. He would have to get a chain like Joe Wheeler's. Everybody ought to have a chain on his front door. . .

And there was Peggy, his wife, coming down the stairs, in a long house coat, holding it up a little, her eyes anxious and black-circled in her pale face. "Henry. Oh, Henry, thank God you're home."

He mumbled something. Then she switched on the hall light, and screamed a little. He looked down at himself. His clothes were soaked with rain, his shirt filthy, and despite all the water, there was still some of the reek of liquor on him. He put up his hand slowly, and his fingers found the bump where they'd knocked him out in the bar on Slack Street.

A couple of buttons were missing from his coat, and his necktie was a soggy string.

He said, with a great effort: "Don't ask any questions, Peggy. Don't ever ask any questions about

tonight. I've been through hell."

She was a good girl. The remembrance of how good she was made tears come to his eyes. She bent over and got an arm under his shoulders, helped him to his feet. "All right," she said. "No questions."

They started up the stairs. He was making a terrible attempt to struggle back to normalcy, to remember business and what he had to do tomorrow. His whole schedule of accounts had been in his briefcase, and that was gone. He was going to be bawled out by the sales manager, he might even lose his job. . . There had been forty dollars in the wallet, and Gwen had that. And his hat was gone, he'd have to buy a new one, probably his suit was ruined.

They were halfway up the stairs. Peggy stopped on the landing, said: "Rest here a minute. . ."

The phone rang. They looked at each other, he with guilt, she with an expression he couldn't read. It rang and rang, and finally Peggy shrugged and went down to answer it. Maybe she said something about the bell waking the baby, he couldn't be sure. . . She was pretty far along with her pregnancy, the second child was due in two months, he shouldn't have let her help him that way. . . She didn't weigh much.

Her voice came through the concentric rings of fatigue in his head. "Yes, he's back. . . A few minutes ago. . . No, he didn't. . . That won't be necessary. . . Well, if you have to."

Then she was back. "The police," she said. "I called them when you didn't come home."

"Shouldn't have," he mumbled . . . But she was helping him up the stairs again, and then he was in their bedroom, and she was taking his clothes off, clucking a little as she saw the bruises on him.

He stood in the shower a long time, resting his head against the wall, letting warm water flow down his back. When he came out, there were clean pajamas on the bed. He put them on, reached for the covers, and Peggy was back.

"The police," she said. "Downstairs. I told them—well, they said they'd come up here if you'd rather."

"No," he said. "Downstairs. Less noise . . . the baby."

As soon as he came, in robe and slippers, into the living room, Joe Wheeler jumped up and said: "That's him. That's the son of a bitch."

An older man caught Joe Wheeler's arm, and said: "Now, take it easy. I'm Lieutenant Myers, this is Detective Sloan, he'll take notes. Mr. Croft, your wife's description, when she phoned in, was so much like the one Mr. Wheeler gave us of the fellow who—"

Henry Croft said: "Yes. I was there when they held up Mr. Wheeler."

Lieutenant Myers said: "You'll have to tell us."

Henry Croft told it. He told it all but two things: the names—just first names—he'd heard, and the location of the bar he'd found them in.

Joe Wheeler said: "It listens right. He didn't have a mask, the others did. I guess they were pushing him around, now I think of it . . . I want to go home. My wife's nose is broken, the doctor's there."

Henry Croft said: "I'm sorry."

Joe Wheeler said, gruffly: "You don't look like you had it so easy yourself." Then he turned and slammed out.

Lieutenant Myers said: "You won't tell us the names, or where you met them?"

"They know where I live," Henry Croft said. "They found pictures of my wife and baby in my pocket. For God's sake, Lieutenant . . ."

The Lieutenant nodded, slowly. "All right. I can't make you talk. Maybe the D.A. could, but probably he won't want to. If I need you, I'll call on you."

Henry Croft didn't go to work the next day. The day after he did, though, and it wasn't good. Peters, the sales manager was sore about the loss of the schedule, sore about the day off . . . He took Henry Croft off his territory and gave it to another man, put Henry on a route that would make three quarters as much, at the best.

He had to buy a hat, a briefcase, a suit. His hospital plan would pay for the coming baby, but not for somebody to stay with his kid while his wife was in the hospital. The house needed a paint job bad. And he was sure that insurance salesman would be back when the new baby came. With another child, Henry Croft earnestly believed, just as the salesman had said, a man owed it to his wife and kids to have a little more insurance.

A week after it all happened, he sat at his desk, making up his daily reports, but his mind was on money. Joe Wheeler was maybe covered by insurance, but he was the one who had been robbed. Henry Croft. Sucker was what they had called him, and they were right. That he agreed with their name for him caused a hot flush of anger.

He threw down his pencil and shoved the reports on the desk away from him. This defiance startled him, but also made him feel strangely good.

"They took forty dollars from me," he said forcefully in his thought, "and I'm going to make them give it back."

But at once the courage wooshed out of Henry Croft, like air out of a busted balloon. What was that his mother always said? She said that it was better to be a live dog than a dead lion.

The phone rang, and he picked it up. His wife's voice said, "Henry. I hated to call you, but—"

"What is it?" An image of her body, misshapen with child, falling, flashed in his mind. "You're all right?"

"It's all right, dear. I'm all right."

It was their son who had come down with some virus and the doctor had been in. She had to have him make a house call because of the high fever. Would he pick up the prescription?

Henry Croft said no he might be be a little late; have it delivered and give the delivery kid a dime tip; he hung up.

She shouldn't be worried, he thought, not in her condition. Money. A house call costs more. The hot anger washed through him again and he unconsciously clenched his fist.

It was four-thirty and Henry Croft told the girl at the switchboard that he was going to make a call. He hadn't told a lie. She looked at him strangely as he went out.

The street didn't look any better, even though it wasn't rainy and windy as it had been that day, but mild with the first suggestion of summer.

Henry Croft walked across the street and into the bar. At first the gloomy interior appeared deserted. The juke box bulked dark and silent. For an instant he felt relief that there was no one there. Carley came out of the Men's Room, wiping his hands on his apron.

"Yeah?" Carley said as he headed for the bar. Then as he came down back of it, he recognized his customer.

Henry Croft put his hat on the bar. "Scotch," he said. "Where are the others? The girl and the others? I want my forty dollars."

"Have you gone off your nut!" He kept his eyes on Henry as he poured the Scotch.

Paul and Gwen and Juney sauntered in the front door.

Carley said: "You know what sucker here wants? He wants his forty bucks." Carley let out a guffaw.

"No kiddin'," Juney said.

Paul laughed.

Gwen took Henry Croft's arm in both her hands and drew herself up close to him, put her lips to his throat.

"G'wan," Carley urged Gwen. "G'wan. Maybe he'd take that forty he's squawking about in trade."

Paul said: "This your hat?" and picked up Henry Croft's hat from the bar.

Henry Croft, with a violent twist of his shoulders, knocked Gwen to one side. "You put that hat down," he ordered Paul, cords in his neck distended, arms tensed, fists clenched. "Put it down, you sonofabitch, or I'll kill you!"

A long silence. Paul spun the hat on his forefinger.

"Put it down."

As Paul put the hat down on the bar with exaggerated care, he shrugged and said, "He says he

wants me to put his hat down."

They all laughed. All of them except Henry Croft. He took the gun from his pocket that they had given him in Jim Wheeler's home and he said, "Now. My forty dollars."

Gwen said: "Isn't he the big, big man."

They all laughed again.

Henry Croft gestured with the gun. He told Gwen: "Right in the face," he said. "So help me, the bullet right in your face."

The place turned very silent. Henry felt himself quivering. Not with fear. Rage had carried him beyond fear.

Juney said, finally: "He's sore. He's real sore." He laughed. It was a very flat laugh.

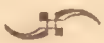
Gwen's face was white.

Carley rang up No Sale on the register. As he took bills out, he said, "He didn't go snitchin' to the cops. No cop's been here. Henry's okay." He was almost placating. "You deadheads chip in on this. Get it up, before he shoots my place all to hell."

Paul turned the hat over on the bar and each of them dropped their contribution into it, laughing, making cracks, but dropping it in.

Henry Croft counted the money before he left. He drank his scotch, neat. Then he walked straight out, not backing out, but straight out.

Tomorrow by God he was going in to Peters' office and demand his old route back. Peters had no goddam right taking it away from him. He hoped his kid's fever had subsided.



In Indianapolis, Ind., Saul I. Rabb, criminal court judge, rejected a request that jurors in a robbery case be examined by a psychiatrist. Judge Rabb said jurors could be barred from serving on a number of grounds, but there was no law requiring that they be sane.

Police Chief Ray Castle, of Catlettsburg, Ky., recently arrived at the station and found the following note from the night shift on his desk: "Dear Chief, the radio in the police car won't work. The lights are out in the men's restroom. The town clock is seven minutes slow. Pay day is ten days past due."

In Detroit, Romeo Cairo, operator of a music studio, told police two men came in and asked him if he had a trumpet and clarinet. He produced the two instruments, the men produced revolvers, then fled with the trumpet and clarinet.

His hands were big. They were gloved.
Sustained pressure was all the job required.

A Ride Downtown

BY ROBERT TURNER

HAMILTON SAT in the car and waited. The night was stifling hot, more like July than September, and he had all the car windows down. The windows of most of the apartments in this suburban neighborhood were open, so that he could hear snatches of sound coming from them: a radio announcer unctuously, sincerely ex-

tolling the merits of a motor car; a hi-fi set blaring out the blasting beat of Little Richard's rock-'n-roll; a woman shrilling at her children.

At times Hamilton could pick out the individual sounds quite clearly; at others, they all blended into a maddening cacophony of noises. All this was quite in keeping, almost in rhythm, with his own thoughts. At times he was able to think about himself and about Kay and about Don Stafford, quite clearly and separately. More frequently, thoughts of all three blurred together in his mind in a seething mixup that made his head hurt.

All the time he sat there in the car, listening and thinking, he never took his eyes from the entrance of the apartment house where Kay had entered almost an hour ago — and from which she would eventually leave. He was afraid to take his eyes from the apartment entrance because he was afraid he might miss seeing Kay come out. Her exit would be the final pressure to make him do what he had to do.

Sitting there, waiting, Hamilton tried quite coldly and logically, to figure why Kay was doing something like this to him. What did she need, what was lacking in him, that she could find in a man like Stafford? Wasn't he, Hamilton, just as attentive and gallant? How could anyone else worship Kay more than he did? Didn't he give her everything she could possibly want in this world? Sometimes he just didn't understand women. Of course, Stafford was somewhat younger, but Hamilton didn't think that was the answer. The man must have put some kind of a spell on her to make her do something like this. Well, the spell would be ended tonight.

It was not quite thirty minutes later that Hamilton finally saw Kay leave Stafford's apartment building. It almost sickened him to see the furtive way she looked about her when she came out, the obvious guilt in her movements. He did not worry about her seeing him, though; his car was well hidden in the shadows of a tree, out of range of a street light, and in the opposite direction from that which Kay would take to go home.

Hamilton waited until Kay was well out of sight and then he took the pair of rubber surgical gloves that he had bought at a downtown drugstore earlier in the day and put them on. He had some difficulty getting them over his huge hands. When they were finally on, he got out of the car. He walked with rather short, mincing steps for such a tall and bulky man, toward the entrance of Stafford's building.

He rang Stafford's bell. There was hardly any wait before the buzzer sounded to release the catch on the vestibule door. With his big hands, now sweating and itch-

ing under their tight rubber casings, thrust into his pockets, he climbed the stairs to the third floor where Don Stafford was standing in the doorway of his apartment, waiting to see who his caller was.

Stafford was a big man, too, but a couple of inches shorter than Hamilton and at least sixty pounds lighter in weight. Hamilton was somewhat startled to see, at this moment, that in many ways Stafford resembled him. There was a similarity in the high broad forehead, the thinning, silky brown hair and the wide, mobile, good natured looking mouth. In that instant, Hamilton had the momentary crazy notion that Stafford could almost be mistaken for his younger brother.

"Yes?" Stafford said. "What can I do for you?" He seemed quite surprised to see Hamilton, and Hamilton knew that this was probably because he thought that it was Kay who had returned for some reason. Stafford relaxed as he saw Hamilton's mild smile.

Quietly, almost meekly, Hamilton said: "Mr. Stafford, I wonder if I might speak with you for a moment about something highly important. And confidential."

Stafford hesitated and then stood aside to permit Hamilton to pass him and enter the apartment. Inside, after Stafford had shut the door behind them, Hamilton looked around the big living room, but he didn't even notice how it was furnished. He wasn't seeing, looking; he was smelling.

"Even if I hadn't known Kay had been here recently, I could still tell," he said. "The scent of her is quite prominent in here." His eyes swung past Stafford toward the opened door of a bedroom, where the covers and sheets were drawn back on a rumpled bed.

"Kay?" Stafford said. He seemed to momentarily choke on the name. His gaze darted now to Hamilton's hands, clenched and bulging the pockets of a sport jacket.

"Yes. Kay Hamilton. Kay."

Stafford swallowed hard and cleared his throat. "I – ah – I'm afraid I don't understand, sir. Who are you and what's the purpose of your visit?"

"My name is Hamilton. The same as Kay's."

Hamilton watched Stafford's rather prominent Adam's apple move up and down, saw that he had been rendered speechless.

"I'm sorry, sir," Stafford finally said. "I didn't know. Honestly, I didn't. Why, Kay swore she wasn't–"

"I didn't come up here to discuss that," Hamilton interrupted, "but simply to see to it that you don't bother Kay any more. I will not have her doing things like this."

As Hamilton moved toward him in his peculiar, short-stepped, mincing gait, Stafford flung an arm up protectively. "She won't – I mean – I won't," Stafford said. "I prom-

ise you, sir. There's no need to get physical about something like this."

Hamilton kept moving toward him and Stafford kept backing up until he hit a wall of the room. Hamilton said: "I don't want you to holler or try to stop me, do you understand. I don't want this to be messy."

Stafford stared in horror as he saw Hamilton's hands come out of his pockets, saw the size of them and the tight, pink Latex gloves sheathing them. Too late, he tried to dodge away as Hamilton lunged toward him. Hamilton's great hands closed over Stafford's throat. Stafford tried to break the grip, struggled frantically, but all that happened was that Hamilton's hands closed more and more tightly until drops of sweat oozed out from under the wrist bands of the rubber gloves and Stafford's legs gave under him. Long after Stafford was hanging helplessly limp from his hands, Hamilton continued to squeeze. While he did this, he averted his eyes so that he wouldn't see what was happening to Stafford's face.

When he was finished, Hamilton let Stafford fall to the floor and then quietly left the apartment. He was quite certain nobody saw him leave the building. He got into his car and halfway home he threw the rubber gloves out the window onto the street.

When he arrived home, Kay was in the bathroom, fixing her hair before the mirror. She was a tall woman whose statuesque figure couldn't even be hidden by a faded, almost formless bathrobe. Her face was finely featured and would have been pretty except that it was a completely colorless face, devoid of character. She was about thirty-five, a little over twenty years younger than Hamilton.

She looked around at him, smiling faintly, as he passed the door. She said: "I'm sorry I took so long at the library, with that research, but I had trouble finding the right books. Where have *you* been, Poppa?"

"It got a little lonesome here with you gone so long, honey," he said. "So I took a ride downtown and back. Were you worried about me?"

"A little," she said.

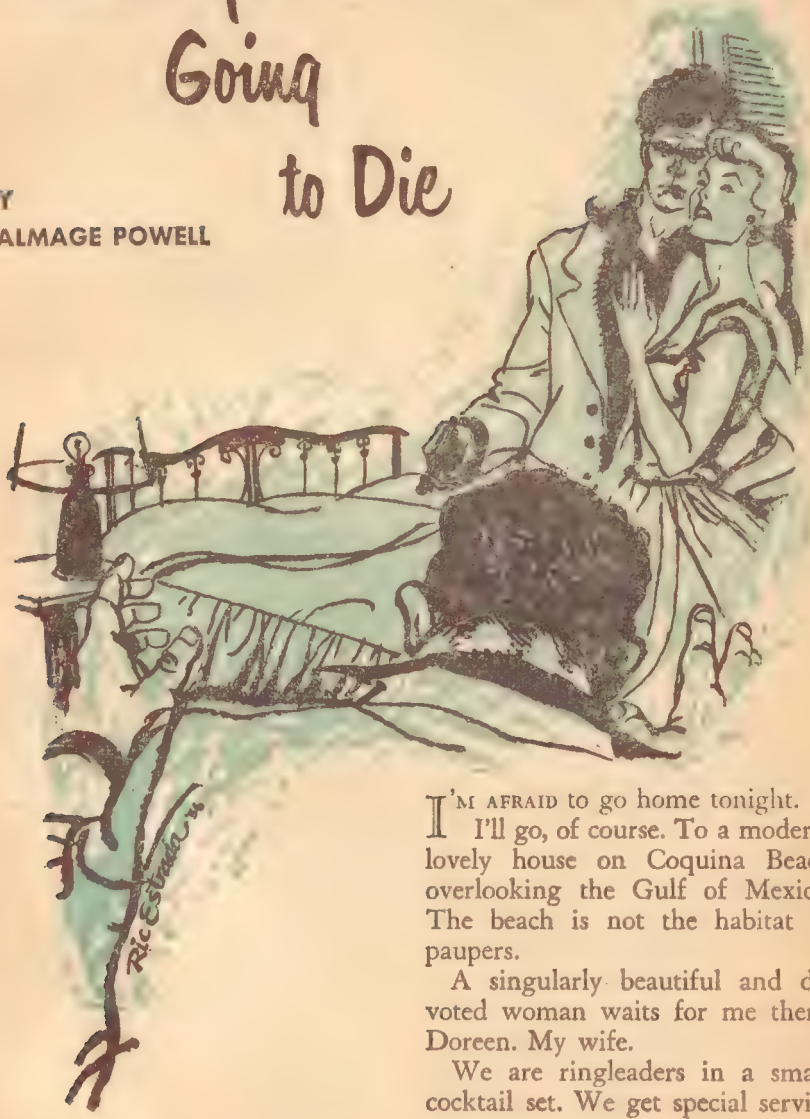
"Hurry and finish with your hair, Kay," he told her. "All the TV programs we like are on tonight. I've missed our nice evenings together, since you've been so busy with your — research."

He didn't hear what she answered. He was busy thinking about how she would react when she heard about Stafford tomorrow. He hoped his daughter would not get too ill and upset; he couldn't afford to take too much time off from work right at this time.

Somebody's Going to Die

BY
TALMAGE POWELL

"This isn't an office," Sam said. "It's a bedroom!" I let him have it. Doreen started laughing low and soft . . .



I'M AFRAID to go home tonight.

I'll go, of course. To a modern, lovely house on Coquina Beach overlooking the Gulf of Mexico. The beach is not the habitat of paupers.

A singularly beautiful and devoted woman waits for me there. Doreen. My wife.

We are ringleaders in a smart cocktail set. We get special service whenever we go into a beach rest-

aurant. Everything has worked perfectly. No one on the beach suspects how we came into our money.

To an outsider I might well be a person to envy. Yet I would give five years of my life if I could escape going home tonight.

Doreen was unaware of the jam I was in when we went on that hunting trip together six months back. We had been married only a few weeks at the time, after getting acquainted during a business trip I took to Atlanta.

She was still pretty much of a stranger to me, and she was such an intense person I didn't know how she would take the news.

We'd had a wonderful time on the trip. Few women would have taken the dark, tangled swamp, the south Georgia heat as Doreen had. Snakes, alligators, they didn't faze her. Neither had the panther.

We were in Okeefanokee hunting deer. I'd struck the panther's spoor in late afternoon. I'd wanted Doreen to turn back, but she'd looked at me strangely.

"Enos," she said, "I never suspected you'd be afraid of anything. You're big, ugly, direct, blunt, hardheaded, cruel—or is that only a front?" She finished with a short laugh, but there was a seriousness beneath her words.

"I'm not afraid for myself," I said.

"Then never be afraid for me," she said excitedly. "Come on, Enos, I want to see you get this cat."

I jumped the cat twenty minutes later. As it came out of a clump of palmetto and saw grass I put a 30-30 slug in her. My aim was a trifle high. The panther screamed, pinwheeled in the air, and came at me, a crazed mass of fury and hatred.

Doreen stood her ground and waited for me to shoot the cat. When the beast lay still and prone, it was I who had to wipe sweat from my face.

Doreen walked to the cat slowly. Blood on the animal's hide was already beginning to draw flies and gnats.

"See, Enos," Doreen said, "some of it is still pumping out of her, the hot, red life. Wasn't she beautiful in death?"

I shivered. "Yeah," I said. "Yeah. Let's get back to camp."

We returned to camp and Doreen cooked our supper. Rabbit on a wooden spit and sourdough biscuits.

When we had eaten, we retired to our tent behind mosquito netting. Around us the swamp was coming to life. Its music was a symphony with tones ranging from the shrill of crickets to the basso of the frogs. The swamp rustled and sighed and screamed occasionally.

Doreen slipped into my arms. "You were wonderful with the cat today, Enos."

Thinking of it, her breath quickened and I could feel her

heart beating against me.

"I've shot 'em before," I said.

She pulled my chin around with her thumb and forefinger. "I don't interest you a bit at the moment, Enos," she stated. "What's bothering you?"

"A business detail. Nothing for you to worry about."

"I'm your wife," she said. "Tell me."

"All right," I said looking directly into her eyes. They were large and dark. In the dim light of the lantern her pupils were dilated and as black as the glossy midnight color of her hair.

"I'm in trouble," I added after a moment. "Serious trouble. I might even be yanked into prison."

"Why?"

"I've taken some money that doesn't belong to me."

"From whom?"

"Sam Fickens."

"Your business partner," she said.

"That's right. You know we've been spending at a heavy clip, Doreen. The house was costly. A good buy, you don't find many old colonials on an estate any more. But costly."

"You're sorry, Enos?"

"I'm not sorry for a thing," I said. "Except that money ran short. Sam and I had this deal with the Birmingham company coming up. My share would cover the shortage. But the deal blew up. And Sam discovered the shortage the day before you and I left on this trip. He told me to go ahead and take the trip — and use it to figure out whether I want to make him sole owner of the company or spend a few years in prison."

"Why, the dirty snake," Doreen said, not without a degree of admiration in her voice. "It's nothing short of blackmail."

"True."

"You're not going to let him get away with it, are you?"

"What can I do?"

She looked at me oddly. "You're asking me. You, a man, asking a woman?"

I colored a little. "I told you not to worry your head with it. I'll figure something out."

She lay back on her cot. I smoked a cigarette. I was lighting a second from it when she said, "Enos?"

"Yes?"

"If anything happened to Sam what would happen to the business?"

"I'd get his share. It's not an unusual partnership arrangement."

"Well, you didn't hesitate when that cat was coming after you this afternoon, did you?"

I went cold under the muggy sweat on my body. "You mean kill Sam."

"You've killed before, haven't you?"

"That was war."

"This is too. What's the difference? A stranger with a yellow skin is out to kill you in a jungle. You kill him first. Everybody says

wonderful, good guy, well done. Now a man is hunting you in a jungle of sorts—and with dirty weapons. You owe it to both of us to protect yourself."

"The difference is in a little thing called the law, Doreen."

She threw back her head and laughed, raised on her elbows and sat looking at me until I glanced away.

Then she turned on her side away from me. "I really thought I'd married a man with guts, Enos." She sounded genuinely hurt, disappointed. And I'd been afraid of how she would react to the news that I'd embezzled some money.

I turned in, but I didn't sleep. I lay there listening to the swamp, aware of her an arm's length away.

Finally I said, "How would you go about it?"

"How'd you know I wasn't asleep, Enos?"

"I could tell. I asked you a question."

"Well, I'd do it with witnesses. Then I'd call the law, hand over the gun, and stand trial. That way, when you walk out of the courtroom, a free man, there can never be any kickbacks."

"Just like that, huh? I'm going to confess to a murder and get off scot free?"

She sat up and turned to face me. Her face had changed. It was as if the angles and bones had shifted to form new shadows. She laughed, soft and low.

"Who said anything about murder, Enos? You know your people here in south Georgia. You know their code, the way they live, their outlook. Do you think a jury of such men will condemn another man for protecting the sanctity of his home?"

I wanted to tell her to stop talking right now. I didn't want to think about killing Sam. He was a hard, greedy cookie without much mercy in his makeup, but he . . . Well, he had me in a corner.

He would use any weapon at hand. He'd proved that.

I'd worked hard. My part of the business was worth plenty. Sam was a swine, grabbing his chance to take it all.

It was really his fault. He was leaving me no out. He knew I wouldn't face prison.

He'd asked for it . . .

He wasn't in the office the day I got back to Mulberry. It was four o'clock before he came in. I heard him in the outer office talking to Miss Sims, our secretary, and then the door of our private office opened to admit him.

"Hello, Enos. Sims said you were back."

He was a big, florid, meaty man. Meaty lips, hands, nose. His brows and hair were pale red. Sims had said he'd been out to the turpentine fields all day inspecting a new lease.

"How does the lease look?" I asked.

He gave me a smug grin. "You think the lease really concerns you, Enos?"

I studied his face. All I could see was a man gloating. "I'd hoped you'd softened your attitude, Sam."

His laugh was his reply.

"You know I can make that few thousand up in a matter of weeks, Sam. We've been in business . . ."

"And business is business, Enos." A sneer came into his eyes. "You should have thought of that. I needed a partner when we started this company."

"And you don't now?"

"Not a stinking crook. No, I don't need that kind of partner." He sat down behind his desk. "What'll it be, Enos? Sign the papers? Or go to jail?"

"I don't hanker to be locked up, Sam."

"No," he said acidly. "I was sure you wouldn't. You're too great a lover of life for that, too much the gladhanded popularity guy."

It struck me that he hated me, had always hated me. To him, in this case, business was going to be a pleasure.

"I'll make one last appeal, Sam . . ."

"Save it. I've said all I'm going to."

"But I'll say it anyhow. You know what my portion of the company is worth. Many times the few thousand I borrowed . . ."

"Stole, Enos, that's the word."

I drew in a breath while he sat and watched me and enjoyed himself.

"Well," I said. "Surely you could pay a few thousand more . . ."

"You've had every dime you're going to get for your share, Enos. That's it. Now make up your mind. We either have the papers signed before noon tomorrow or I'm swearing out a warrant."

I sat and looked at him for a minute. But I didn't need to make a decision. It had been made all ready. It was seething in my blood and flashing hotly across my brain.

"Have you mentioned any of this to another living soul?" I asked.

"No."

"If I make this sacrifice," I said, "I'll be doing it to keep my name absolutely clean."

"I know that," he said. "I know it's my lever, my weapon, Enos. Made up your mind?"

I stood and nodded. "Come out to the house tonight. About eight. I have an errand to do, but Doreen will be there. You can chin with her if I'm late. Have a drink, if you like. I guess we might as well settle this with as little rancor as possible."

"That's sensible talk, Enos. I'm glad you're taking it this well."

"What can I do?"

"Not a damn thing," he said in huge enjoyment. "Don't worry. I'll be there. Waiting for you."

Early that evening I drove over to Macon to see a cousin who had been ill for some time. He was

surprised and glad to see me. We made small talk for an hour or so. Business. My marriage. The weather. I left with a promise that I'd bring Doreen and we'd have a real old-fashioned Georgia watermelon cutting sometime soon.

I was back in Mulberry by nine-thirty. Driving through the elm and maple-lined back streets in the darkness I felt tension building in me. There was a thickness in my throat and a tingling in the tips of my fingers. The large, old houses, set beyond wide lawns, were peaceful, serene.

At the edge of town I turned left, picked up the sideroad that ran to The Willows, the fine old place I'd bought for Doreen.

I drove down the dark tunnel with weeping willows on either side. Then my headlights picked up the house, the wide veranda, the white columns. A portion of the downstairs was lighted.

I parked in the driveway beside the house, cut the lights, opened the glove compartment, and transferred the .38 revolver to the side pocket of my coat.

I found Sam and Doreen in the front parlor of the house. A pig about everything, Sam had partaken well of the brandy from the bottle on the sideboard.

His eyes were heavy-lidded, his face reddish purple with blood. He looked up at me and grinned. "You took long enough, Enos."

"But I'm here now," I said. "Everything all set, I suppose."

Doreen had risen to stand behind Sam. She nodded. Sam said everything was set. His words meant nothing. Her nod was what interested me.

Only minutes of life remained to Sam now. I tried to keep from thinking about it. My knees were weak, and my mouth was so dry I wondered if I could get the next words out.

"Okay," I said. "Come on and we'll get it over with."

Doreen started from the room. Her eyes were glinting as if sheened with satin.

Sam sat a moment, shrugged, and got up.

We went down a corridor. Doreen opened a door on a dark room.

We entered and I heeled the door closed. I palmed the gun and pulled it out of my pocket.

Doreen switched on the light.

Sam started. "Hell, this isn't an office or a den — it's a bedroom!"

I heard Doreen breathing. "That's right, Sam," she said softly.

He turned to look at her, and I let him have it. Another five seconds and the last of my nerve would have been gone. I had to do it then.

The bullet hit him in the left temple, ranged upward, and left a hole the size of a half dollar when it came out of his skull.

And yet he didn't die immediately. He lived for perhaps five seconds. He twitched, the breath

rattled in his throat. He half-turned himself on the carpet where he lay. Then he was dead.

Doreen had watched every bit of it. She was half-kneeling, to watch the final flick of light fade from his face. She rose, and in her face and eyes was a rapt expression.

I felt like shaking at her, yelling at her.

She turned her face toward me, her eyes trying to focus through the fever in them. She didn't seem to know where she was for a moment. Then she started laughing, low and soft.

"Cut it out!" I said. "Doreen—stop it!"

She brushed her glossy hair away from her temples with both hands. "Hello, Enos. Dear Enos. I feel higher than the proverbial Georgia pine right now. Did you see it, the way death came creeping over him? He fought, Enos. Every cell of him wanted to live. But we had that power over him, didn't we? The power to smash the life out of him . . ."

This was the worst moment yet. I felt sweat running down the sides of my face.

I grabbed her by the shoulder and slapped her across the cheek. She didn't seem to feel the blow, but her eyes cleared a little.

"There's still a lot to be done," I said. "We haven't much time."

I ripped her blouse across the shoulder and struck her again so that my finger marks were on her cheek. Doreen said nothing.

"I've got to make the phone call now," I said. "Sure you're okay?"

She nodded. "Give me a cigarette."

I gave her a cigarette. "Come on," I said.

She was still looking at Sam over her shoulder as I pulled her from the room.

In the front parlor, I steadied myself and dialed Dolph Crowder's number.

The sheriff answered on the second ring.

"Dolph," I said, "this is Enos Mavery. I think you better come out to The Willows right away."

"What's the trouble, Enos?"

"I've just shot and killed Sam Fickens."

I heard him take an explosive breath. Then he said in a tight but quiet tone, "I'll be there in five minutes."

He was as good as his word. In five minutes he was pounding on the front door. I had used the time to burn and flush into non-existence the papers Sam had brought with him tonight, the papers giving him full control of the company.

I gave Doreen a glance. Her eyes were clear now, her face composed.

I opened the front door just as Dolph started to knock again. He was a thin, long-faced man. Ice blue eyes. Long, sharp nose, razor keen jaw.

"Where is he, Enos?"

"In my wife's bedroom," I said. "Here's the gun."

I handed him the revolver. He looked at it, sniffed at it, dropped it in his pocket and stepped into the hallway. He nodded a greeting to Doreen, not missing the finger marks on her face, the tear in her blouse.

"Which way?" he asked.

"I'll show you," I said. Doreen started with us. "You stay here," I told her.

"Enos, I . . . "

"Stay here!" I didn't know exactly why. But I didn't want her to look at the dead man again. More precisely, I feared, for some reason, having Dolph see her if she should look at him.

Dolph and I went back to the bedroom.

Dolph stood looking down at Sam for several seconds. "You did one hell of a complete and messy job, Enos."

"I meant to — at the time. When I came in here and saw what he was trying to do I didn't think of but one thing, Dolph. The same thing you and any other man around here would think of."

"I see," he said softly. "Better tell me the rest of it."

"There isn't much to tell," I said. "Sam knew I was going to Macon tonight. He came here in my absence on a pretext he wanted to talk to me about business. He was already pretty well boiled. My wife let him in — after all, he was my business partner. He had a brandy in the front parlor, she told me. Then he began to want to get cozy. When she ordered him out, he got pretty vile and coarse with his talk. To escape him, she came back here. She couldn't get the door locked, he was too close behind her, telling her what a fool she was for marrying a homely mug like me, how much more he could do for her, how many nights he'd lain awake just thinking about her."

I paused for breath. Dolph waited patiently.

"You ought to be able to piece the rest of it together," I said. "I heard her scream. She was trying to get away from Sam when I came in the room. I tell you, Dolph, I didn't know what the hell I was doing. I heard him laughing at her, telling her to be nice, to be sweet to him . . . that kind of stuff."

"I went for him. To tell you the truth, I meant to strangle him. He shoved me to one side. I was off balance and stumbled against the bureau. I don't remember getting the gun . . . it was in the bureau drawer. I don't even remember shooting him, but I did. One minute he was there; then he was on the floor and I was standing over him cussing him for everything I could lay my tongue to. Then I saw he was dead and that knocked me back into kilter. I phoned you— and that's it."

"You have any trouble with Sam

before this?" Dolph Crowder asked.

"No. I never liked him much as a person. But who did?"

Dolph nodded. "The town thought of him as a pig. A greedy one at that. A sort of smug, self-sufficient man who figured anything he wanted was his just because he was Sam Fickens."

"I know all that, Dolph. But I never let him get under my skin before. We had a growing company. We were making money. I didn't care too much what he was like."

"He ever come around here before when you were gone?"

"Once or twice," I said. "Doreen told me. She didn't like him. Said he gave her the willies."

"How about when you were here?"

"Come to think of it, he's been a lot more sociable since I got married . . . But I don't think he'd have pulled this act tonight if he hadn't been drunk. I swear, Dolph, I'm sorry now I did it. I should have just beat him up and thrown him out. But for a few seconds there I didn't know what I was doing . . . coming home . . . hearing her scream . . . walking in to see him . . ."

"Don't dwell on it," Dolph said. "I'll have to take you into town."

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Your wife will have to make a statement, of course."

"I know you're just doing your job, Dolph."

I had a private cell in the local pokey that night. Dolph's wife brought me a fine breakfast next morning, country ham, redeye gravy, grits swimming in butter, eggs, hot biscuits, steaming coffee.

That breakfast did more than fill my stomach. It fed my mental state. It told me the whole town was buzzing — with the talk in my favor.

I was charged with manslaughter and out on bail before noon. Folks in town did their best to talk and act as if I had no charge hanging over me. Doreen was relaxed, in good spirits, contented as a cat that's had a big bowl of warm milk.

I went on trial in circuit court the fifth day of the following month. When the trial opened, I had my lawyer ask the judge if I could make a statement to the court. The request was granted.

I got to my feet, conscious of the packed courtroom. I walked quietly to the stand, the same Enos Mavery they'd known all my life, the Enos who paused to crack a joke or a fruit jar of corn. The Enos who could talk to a dirt farmer as well as a fellow member of our country club.

I was sworn in and sat down in the witness chair.

"Folks," I said, "I don't see much point in dragging this thing out. We're all taxpayers and every hour this court sits costs us money.

"Clay Rogers is a fine prosecutor. I ought to know. I went to school

with him. He's going to tell you that I shot Sam Fickens. Now old Clay ain't givin' to lying, and I don't deny it. I sure did shoot him — and I guess I might do it again under the same circumstances. I came home that night and found the dirty skunk using his brute strength on my wife. I went as crazy as a loon, got my hands on a gun, and pulled the trigger. I didn't try to hide a thing, and I'm not trying to now. I got Dolph Crowder on the phone soon as I saw what I had done, and I'm here now to tell you I did it. The man entered my home under a pretext, followed my wife when she tried to get away, forced himself into the bedroom — and I'm just thankful I got there when I did. If that makes me a criminal, then justice in the state of Georgia ain't what I've always thought it to be . . . I thank you."

There was more testimony. From Dolph, Doc Joyner, who is coroner in his spare time, from several people who had known Sam. And from Doreen. She simply backed up what I had said. She was dressed as always, attractively, making no pretense that she wasn't a beautiful woman.

The jury was out for an hour.

I walked out of the courtroom a free and rich man.

Doreen and I sold out a few weeks later. She was restless, and I had no real desire to live in Mulberry longer.

We toured Florida and decided on the Coquina Beach place. For awhile it appeared life might settle to normal, but when we were through the decorating, the hundred and one things in establishing a new residence that kept us busy, Doreen became restless again.

I tried everything. Cocktail parties — they were too vapid. Another hunting trip — but a bleeding animal held no more interest for her.

Doreen hired a yard man last week and fixed up quarters over the garage for him. But we don't really need a full-time yard man. I looked into his background. A bum. From the downtown waterfront and wino jungles. Comes from nowhere.

But I suspect where he is going. It's been building in Doreen for quite awhile now. And I don't know what to do. If I warned the yard man, somebody else would be marked.

Somebody's going to die — to provide a thrill for Doreen. Nothing less will calm that mounting restlessness.

I certainly am afraid to go home tonight.

He carried a case containing a fortune in gems and he'd never been robbed. Then Morten found the Jewel of Nakedness . . .

His Own Jailor

BY BRYCE WALTON

THIS TIME, she got Morten so fearfully worked up that he ran into the bathroom and slammed the door.

"Hurry up, Morty," she said. "You'll have to be leaving soon."

He looked at his flat characterless face in the mirror on which tooth-brush splatters had accumulated. The specks gave his face an oddly diseased look. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead. He felt some of the pain, from having clamped his teeth too hard, leaving his jaws. His normal composure, his calmness, the expressionless sur-

face returned. He was himself.

Rose, he knew, was still lying out there on the bed. She was wearing that blue transparent negligee and nothing else. She was carelessly and incredibly exposing the living jewel of her nakedness. Morton thought of her in this way, because he was always thinking in terms of his trade.

When he arrived at her apartment that evening, she had been wearing nothing but a pair of spike-heeled black pumps, and a wispy black lace gown. He had stood looking, listening to the secret sounds of her body moving under the silk. The fever started then, as it started every evening the same way, but this time it had reached a frightening pitch. That choking elation of feeling was getting beyond control. Such a possibility scared Morten until he felt sick. What if he got too impatient, made her mad at him, made her call off the whole thing? The thought made the bathroom floor go soft under him. Something happened momentarily to the familiar angular pattern of the walls.

Morten hurried out of the bathroom, hesitated in the hall before moving toward the bizarre room where she waited. African masks were in it, weird mobiles, striped walls, a big, burlap-covered Hollywood bed under a wine-colored lamp, shaped like a bottle and suspended from the ceiling.

He had paid the rent for this place a month ago, when he and Rose had started their relationship. He had paid for all this peculiar furnishing. He sympathized with her uncommon taste, but he still did not feel exactly at home here. "This is for you, honey," Rose had said, "whether you look the part or not. You've got an avant- gard soul. One thing we're not, honey. We're not common."

"No," Morty had agreed. "We're not common."

She hated the common things worse than he did. She would tell him about her childhood on the farm, her stint as a car-hop and in a pencil tablet factory. Sometimes she stood naked by the window and made nasty remarks about the common jerks down below.

Joe Pollak had introduced her to Morten. Joe had brought her as a date to the meeting of the Southern California Guild, American Gem Society, at the Biltmore. But Morten had taken her home. Morten still couldn't quite believe that Rose preferred him to the handsome Joe Pollak, even though Joe was wild, dissipated and chronically unemployed these days.

Later Joe told Morten. "She's a mad chick. You see her kind hanging around jewelry exhibits all the time, picking up with salesmen, and loitering around jewelry auctions. They've got a bug about stones. And let me tell you something — with them it's like getting loved up good. They're crazy. They

can hypnotize themselves, drive themselves nuts, looking into a ruby. It's like dope. But she's an interesting chick to play around with. And she goes for you. Those crazy gone stories of yours, man."

He could understand her, he thought, because ordinary little man in a gray suit that he was on the outside, inside he knew what it meant to look into the blazing heart of a precious stone.

He stepped carefully toward the bed. She frowned up at him. She put the wine bottle on the floor, started playing with that lump of uncut diamond he had carried with him for good luck for at least fifteen years.

"Sit down, honey," she said, and patted the bed. He sat rigidly on the edge, gripping his wet hands together.

"You want to kiss me again, honey?" she asked. Only she was looking at the uncut diamond. Her eyes were getting that glazed, distant look.

"Yes, may I?" he said, leaning over her.

"First, tell me another story."

His mouth felt dry. She shifted her long warm thigh against him. His eyes blurred. She was working on him again, working him up to such a pitch that he had trouble speaking, afraid that when he spoke his voice would quiver, or explode in a shout.

"Well," he began carefully. She was playing suggestively with his hand, caressing each finger.

"You can hold my hand if you want," she said.

He thanked her with his eyes as he began to tell her a story. "Well, there was this Mogul Emperor Jehangir. He had his name carved on a noble ruby. He was secure in his belief that he would thereby be remembered to posterity. He believed he would be remembered for a longer time than if he had monuments built of stone, or if historians wrote about him. And one day . . . "

It wasn't a long story. But he made it longer because he was sitting beside her and holding her hand. And the longer he told the story, the more her lips parted, the more her eyes got that dark dreamy look, and she began to work her hand in his in a suggestive way that kept him talking on and on in a kind of stupefied ecstasy, improvising as he went along, bringing in the exotic names of jewels and emperors and queens from other stories he hadn't told her yet.

That first night when she brought him to her apartment after Joe introduced them, they sat close together on the bed, and held hands, and he had told her one of his stories.

He told her, that first night, about the famous Kaianian crown, shaped like a fez, and topped by an uncut ruby that came from Siam and was as large as a hen's egg. And he also told her about the fabulous

Kajanian belt, a foot wide, weighing eighteen pounds, and one complete mass of diamonds, emeralds, pearls and rubies.

She allowed him to kiss her then. The effect of that kiss was like a deep shock. Nothing like it had ever happened to Morten before. His life had altered at once.

All those years before Rose came along, Morten had sat alone in hotel rooms looking at his jewels, and dreaming up stories, and reading books about the fabulous histories of precious stones. He had been a bachelor all his life, and the only women he had known were those anonymous ones you are introduced to by bell-hops and taxi drivers.

But sooner or later he always, as now, ran out of words.

For ten minutes after he stopped talking this time, Rose lay with her eyes closed, her lips parted, the uncut diamond with its odd slivery edge harder than a knife blade shining in the wine-colored light as it glittered in her cupped hand.

"You can kiss me now, honey," she whispered. He leaned over and kissed her, then jerked away, stood up quickly on weak legs. His heart was hammering too hard. He tried to walk away from her but sank down instead on his knees and pressed his face against her breasts. "I want to stay," he said thickly. "Please, let me stay tonight. Please . . . "

His lips felt dry. He realized that he had crossed that agonizing line of terror and timidity, broken through it like someone plunging through a pane of colored glass. She was pushing him away, not unkindly, not irritated, very differently from that other time when he tried to embrace her. She patted his head this time.

He breathed more easily. He had to control himself. He had to be patient. No genuine gem was ever really possessed.

"Next time, honey, you can stay. But now you'd better go."

He stumbled to the closet, slid out his telescope jewelry sample case, and felt the familiar mold of the worn handle settle in his hand as he lifted it.

She still had that sleepy loved look. Her lips had a wet shine across the shadowed room. "Let me keep this again this trip, honey."

He nodded and she gripped the uncut stone in her hands. The trip before last, she had kept the Oriental ruby from his sample case to play with. He had explained to her carefully that it was not just any sort of ruby that you might pick up east of Suez, but a particular kind found in Upper Burma. And the Burmese ruby ranks next in scale of hardness to the sapphire. "Oh honey," she had breathed, "tell me more about it."

He walked out of the apartment now and shut the door. He leaned against the wall a moment before

walking out into the wet night.

When he got to Barstow, his first stop this trip, there would be a telegram waiting for him from Rose. There always was. A telegram telling him not to be lonely, that she was waiting.

That was nice. Nobody had ever been waiting anywhere for Morten before, that he remembered.

He walked down Hollywood Boulevard toward the bus terminal, carrying his sample case containing 70,000 dollars worth of white Pentelle stone rings — Jonker, Vargas and Liberator cut diamonds. Also, since buyers were preparing for June bride sales, and the accent was on wedding rings, Morten was carrying, in addition to his regular elite line, a lot of customized sets — virgin diamonds, Cellincraft, Lord Jason, and Miss Vanity items.

He was thinking of Rose as he walked to the bus terminal, bought his ticket to Barstow, went to a booth in the coffee shop, ordered coffee, and sat there waiting two hours for his bus. He never once thought of the possibility of being robbed. His company was protected by the Jewelers' Security Alliance and Harold Morten was considered a good risk. He had never once been robbed. No one had ever even attempted to rob him. It had been years since Morten had even thought of such a thing.

Joe Pollak, on the other hand, had been held up and robbed so many times, Nathenson and Co., of New Jersey, had been forced to fire him, and Joe had never sold jewels since. After the famous Berland robbery, the Security Alliance sent out a mailing piece, urging every traveling salesman to exercise extreme care in order to avoid similar holdups.

A salesman was never to ride alone in an automobile when carrying valuable merchandise. He was never to leave an automobile unattended when it contained goods or samples. If possible, salesmen should ship their merchandise by registered mail to their destination — preferably to a jeweler who was known to them. If this was not possible, the merchandise should be shipped to a hotel, and —

But Morten had thrown the mailing piece away. He didn't even own a car. He never traveled the same route twice in the same way. He sometimes traveled by bus, sometimes by train, at other times he took a plane. There was no schedule, no routine to his trips. He never checked into the same hotels, except in case of an emergency. He had unique characteristics as a salesman. He entered every retail shop by the back door, did his selling in the rear of the store, left by the back door. He never stayed at the ritzy hotels, but at motels, rooming houses, or at cheap hotels.

Joe Pollak, at a bull session following a convention in San Francisco, once told Morten that the

real reason Morten was never robbed was because he didn't exist. "As a human being, Morty," Joe had said, "you don't exist." Everybody laughed.

"Why not?" Morten asked, his moon-face expressionless.

"Because you're a statistic, the average man. What do you weigh, Morty? How tall are you? What color are your eyes? Your hair? What kind of clothes do you wear? Think about it, man! The average doesn't exist except in statistics. Man, you're anonymous. No heist artist will ever spot you, and even if he did, he couldn't remember what you looked like the next time he saw you."

It was an unpleasant fact, but Morten knew that it was true. Sometimes a retail jeweler to whom Morten had sold many times, momentarily forgot he had ever seen him before. And hotel clerks were frequently embarrassed over not remembering him.

Joe had said, "You walk along, man, getting on and off busses, on and off trains, handling maybe fifty grand in ice like it was Fuller brushes, or cakes of sample soap."

Maybe luck also entered into his not having been robbed, Morten sometimes thought. The fact was that he didn't even belong among the odd group of transients who sold jewelry. He was a jewelry salesman because of the way he felt about precious stones, because of what the stones did to fill up the big empty holes of loneliness and fear in cheap hotels, in towns that never had a name.

Robbery of precious stones had no meaning either. He was convinced that you could not really buy or sell them, that no one ever really owned, for example, such a thing as an Egyptian emerald.

In Barstow, after the bus crossed the dry river bed where willows drooped over hot white sand, he checked into a cheap hotel. He left the sample jewel case in his room, went to Western Union Office, but this time there was no telegram from Rose. Maybe it would be along later, he thought.

He returned to his hotel, drank his regular shot of bourbon, showered, shaved, washed out his orlan shirt and hung it up to dry on a clotheshanger by the open window. He sat down and looked at some of the glittering samples for an hour, dreaming of the Nile, of the treasure vault of the Shah of Iran where, spread upon Oriental rugs of great price, lie jewels beyond price. The famous crown and near it the two lambskin caps in the traditional flower pot shape, adorned with magnificent aigrettes of diamonds, and about them, trays of pearl, ruby, and emerald necklaces, and hundreds of sparkling rings, a jewel-encrusted sword scabbard, and the finest turquoise in the world, three or four inches long, and without a flaw, and an emerald big as a walnut,

covered with the names of the monarchs who had possessed it.

Then when the shirt was dry, he put it on again, and went out for a light dinner of salad and toast, then took a leisurely stroll in the cooling evening breeze. He sat on a park bench, thinking about Rose. Later he would walk back to Western Union. It frightened him to remember the years when there could have been no telegram, when there had been no one, no one at all.

When he got back to Hollywood this time, he would stay with her. She had promised. He would move in and stay with Rose.

As he sat there secretly flushed with anticipation, he heard a slight crunch of gravel behind him in the darkness, and a bursting of breath just to his left. For the first time since he was twelve years old he knew immediately, somehow intuitively, that something horrible was about to happen. His neck tingled. Something in his stomach seemed to turn completely over as he started to shift his head around.

An arm pulled in hard against his windpipe. He dug his fingers into powerful, rigid muscle that was slippery with sweat. He tried to yell, but the sound bubbled and choked off in his throat.

He felt the bench turn, topple under him as he was dragged bodily backward over the slatted wood. And far away, as though his legs were fifty feet long, he could feel and hear his heels sliding through gravel, then down through warm sand. Leaves whipped over his face.

When he opened his eyes, he found that he was lying on damp earth in the dark. He heard insects, but nothing else, except once a dog barking, but that sounded a long way off.

His body throbbed when he moved a little. After that he lay there for what seemed hours. He was afraid to move.

When gray light slid through the cracks of dry wood and a dirty burlap curtain over a window, he still lay there looking dazedly at the unpainted boards, the shingled roof with holes in it, and a rusty, potbellied stove. A cabinet made of three orange crates had several cans of beans in it.

He got up stiffly. He was so freightened he could scarcely stand, but he forced himself to try the door. It was locked, but so flimsy he could have pushed it open.

"Don't make any noise," he heard a voice outside say. Through the cracks he saw a vague form move a little. Twigs crackled. "Don't make a noise in there, Morten. Don't try to make a break either. If you do, I'm coming in there and kill you."

Morten sat quickly down, slid backward until he was pressed tight up against the wall.

"One little peep out of you, Mor-

ten, you're dead, and I mean it."

The voice seemed muffled, disguised, Morten thought dully. And then he stopped thinking. He had to stop thinking, stop feeling. His thoughts could go only one way, and he couldn't stand to go that way.

Hours later, Morten felt paralyzed from sitting rigidly in one place. He moved slowly so as not to make any noise. Then after trying several times he finally managed to whisper. "I'm hungry."

"Eat beans," the voice said.

A can opener was beside the cans and Morten opened a can and ate the warm tasteless beans. He drank from a can of water. There were drowned mosquitoes in the water, but after awhile that didn't bother him.

That night he heard mice squealing near him, felt fear, disgust. He thought of Rose. Something broke inside of him then and he crawled through the darkness to the door and struck it with his small fists.

The door swung open. He felt incredible shock as a fist caught him under the chin. He tried to scream and gagged on his own blood. The blows continued, but after awhile he didn't feel them. All he felt was sickening fear and after that he lay frozen in the darkness.

"The next time, I'll brain you," the voice warned him.

Two days later, in the late afternoon, he lost control of himself. He ran into the door. It was the only time in his life, since vaguely, remembered temper tantrums in front of his mother when he was a kid, that he had ever really completely lost control. He had screamed out several times before he realized the screams were his. And then he ran into the door, beating it with his fists, kicking and screaming. The door opened.

He stood looking, waiting. He knew for the first time in his life that there was something worse than the freezing fear of pain. He felt as though some abscess had broken after years of infectious swelling.

He waited, whimpering a little, expecting the brutal lunge, the shocking horror of kicking feet and drubbing fists. But nothing moved anywhere in the darkness. The only sounds were mosquitoes humming. Once from way down the river through the willows he heard the musical murmuring of Mexican voices, and a guitar strumming. It all faded out. There was nothing else anywhere, but Morten standing, waiting, sobbing.

No one was there. No one guarding the shack. There had been someone here guarding it two days ago. No one now. He leaned against the side of the shack and closed his eyes. Something burned in his throat. He started to cry, openly, like a woman. He was sure that whoever had been here had left at the end of the first day. Only

his own sick fear had held him in the shack. His own jailor. That, he thought, is the story of my life.

He recalled a story he had once read about some fish in a pool. The fish had been kept in one section of the pool by a shadow cast down from above. The fish thought the shadow was real, something solid. And they lived and died, afraid to swim through nothing but a shadow.

It was over five miles back into Barstow. None of the trucks rolling in there for a night's layover stopped to pick Morten up. He walked with a raw feeling underneath, like glass about to crack. He felt like a bottle with pressure building up inside. He felt all the things he had never allowed himself to feel before. He felt a strange, burning joy, a wild anticipation.

As usual, the clerk at his hotel didn't recognize Morten and he had a disgusted look on his face as he eyed Morten's dirty rumpled suit, his once-white shirt. By way of identifying himself, Morten told the clerk the date on which he had checked in.

"Where you been, Mr. Morten, out hunting uranium?" the clerk asked.

Morten looked at the clerk as though he had never seen him before either. "No," he said. "I was waiting for a shadow to go away."

The clerk shrugged.

"I had a case, a square case," Morten said. "Is it here?"

"Oh sure, I put that down in the basement. We got a storage room down there. I figured you just went off and forgot it."

"I want it now please," Morten said. "And you can hurry getting it."

The clerk shrugged again, went through a door across the lobby. Morten looked at the door as though he was looking at something else. His eyes ached. His stomach still felt nauseous, but the fear was no longer there. He went into the men's room, threw cold water on his face. He straightened his tie, combed his hair.

When the clerk brought the case back up, Morten lifted it. It weighed the same, felt the same, but he knew it wasn't the same. He paid the clerk, tipped him a dollar, and walked out onto the almost empty sidestreet. A Mexican sat on some steps cuddling a bottle of wine. A woman was yelling out of a window. He opened the case and took a quick look into it.

A bus would not be fast enough. A train would not be fast enough either. Maybe nothing would be fast enough. Maybe the three days he had been kept in the shack had been enough. But they knew him well, or they thought they had known him well. Well enough to know he was so afraid, so compliant, so cooperative that he could be put in a shack, threatened once, beaten up once, and left there

safely without a guard long enough for them to get into his hotel room, take 70,000 dollars worth of jewelry, and replace it with pebbles. They figured they knew him well enough to be certain he would be imprisoned in that shack by the shadows of fear, long enough for them to get the stuff to a Los Angeles fence and get out of the country with the money.

Maybe they had been right. But he had an idea that they had expected him to stay in that shack even longer, and that afterward he would be so shocked and shattered by the experience he would be incapacitated for an additional period of time.

To save time, Morten rented a car in Barstow from one of those companies that have representative agencies in practically every city in the country. You may rent the car in one city, drive it, and, if you wish, turn it in in another city.

He drove fast into Los Angeles. On the way, he stopped once for gas, and one other time to pour the rocks out of his sample jewel case and check the secret compartment in the side to make sure that the revolver was still there.

He had kept it because it had been a gift from a friend, and it had been in that compartment for over a year. Every jewelry salesman carried one. This one was covered with opals and garnets, and Morten had never thought of it as something that could kill anything. He stopped on the outskirts of Pasadena, at a hardware store, and bought bullets for the gun.

A little before five o'clock in the morning, Morten parked the car in front of the Pagoda Palace Apartments on North Berendo. There couldn't be any mistake about it, of course. It had all been a plot from the start. Joe Pollak and Rose Oparin. Rose was the only one who knew he was going to Barstow. Joe was the man who had kept him in the shack. He was sure of the first, guessing at the second. Whether it was Joe or not, that wasn't so important now anyway.

What was important was very important to Morten. He knew that every night when he left the apartment he had paid for and furnished, Joe had walked in. Morten had been afraid there, too, of taking what was his. Afraid of the shadow in the water.

He was sure that the apartment where he had first visited Rose would be vacated now. And there was only the slightest chance that they hadn't left Joe's apartment yet.

He touched the jeweled gun in his coat pocket. His clothes were suddenly soaked with perspiration. He got out of the car, shut the door, and walked toward the grotesque jumble of flaking plaster and ridiculous concrete Buddhas, back among the ratty palm trees.

Joe Pollak needed a special kind of place, he had once told Morten,

because of his women. A private entrance on the ground floor, preferably in the rear with plenty of screening vegetation – palm trees, poinciana bushes, orange, pepper, and avocado trees. Joe liked this place; he had been living here for several years.

Morten walked between the trees, past a crumbled dragon, with half its plaster tongue missing. The door was red with the lacquer flaking away, and with a moldy brass knocker which Morten lifted and then stood holding as he listened. He thought he heard rustling movement behind the door. He made a rattling sound in his throat as if something had broken loose inside of him.

He kept on standing there like a flower growing in a pot, struggling instinctively like an animal in a net. And this blind struggle drew a shuddering breath out of him. His round moonface had no discernible expression, except for a line of white that circled the thin contours of his lips.

He banged the knocker twice. After some moments, Joe Pollak opened the door cautiously, only a crack, and Morten fired several times. He pushed the door open then and stepped over the body curled up on the floor.

In the shadows, he moved over to the bed where Rose's gray face strained toward him, the mouth open. Closer, he could see the incredible exposed jewel of her nakedness, the jewel that had been denied him – but which was rightly his. He began to quiver as his hands went out to her white breasts, a tremor passed through his body.

He pushed her head back against the pillow and dug his hand into her neck. He could feel her body writhing under his weight, her legs kicking at him. She began to moan, but he bit into her lips and stopped the sounds. He took Rose with all the lust and hate and passion of which he had become capable.

And then he saw the uncut diamond on the table beside the bed. He reached out his hand and grasped it, felt the sharp, hard edges. He towered over Rose now, one hand holding her polished black hair, looking down at her stunned face, her swollen lips.

Someone was banging and kicking at the door.

Morten said softly, "There was the famous Mogul ruby which passed from the hands of the Emperor Jehangir into the hands of Shah Jehan. He gave it to his lovely wife, the same lady for whom as a sorrowing widower, he built the Taj Mahal. And royal gem that it was, it came at last into the hands of Queen Victoria, a few years before the great diamond Koh-i-noor . . . "

Morten slid the uncut diamond through the stretched tendons of her throat.

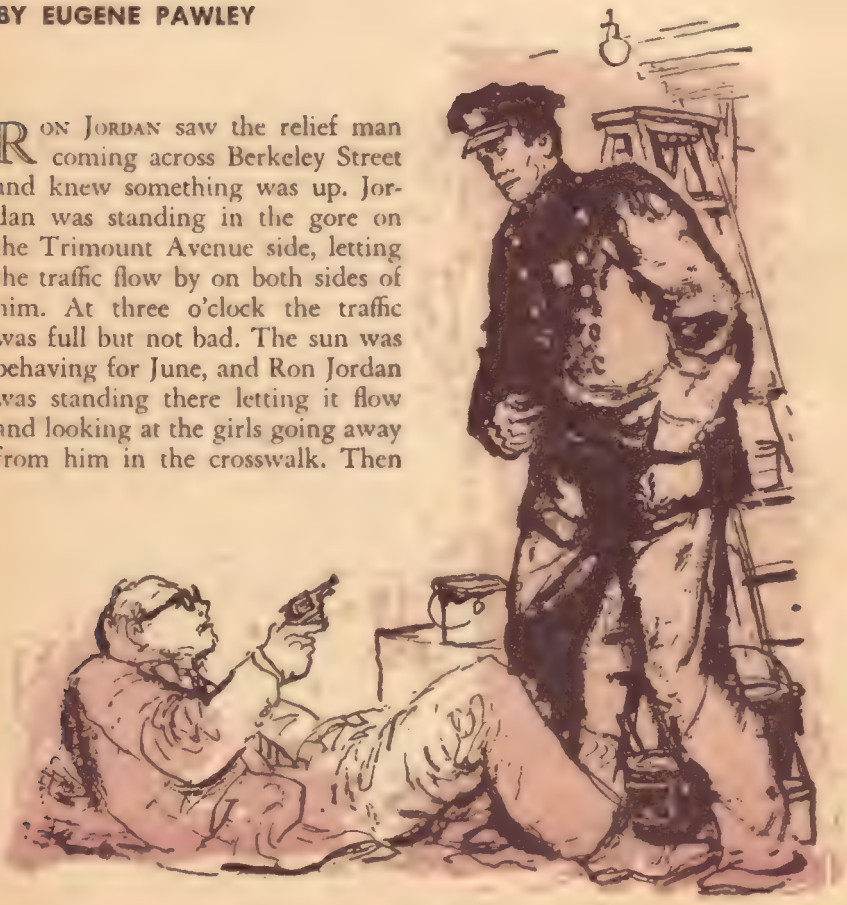
It was as though someone had drawn a red drape across his eyes.

Most traffic cops spend their departmental lives trying to switch to Homicide. Because women found him irresistible, Ron made it in one day.

Bait for the Red-Head

A Novelette

BY EUGENE PAWLEY



RON JORDAN saw the relief man coming across Berkeley Street and knew something was up. Jordan was standing in the gore on the Trimount Avenue side, letting the traffic flow by on both sides of him. At three o'clock the traffic was full but not bad. The sun was behaving for June, and Ron Jordan was standing there letting it flow and looking at the girls going away from him in the crosswalk. Then

this relief, an old traffic fixture named Dennehy, walked out and gave him a funny look.

"You're wanted at the station," said Dennehy.

"What for?"

Dennehy's face, with its puckered round mouth, had a knowing and maybe pleased shape to it. He shot a veiled glance up at Jordan's cap, which sat at a jaunty angle like a flying colonel's; he let his eyes travel slowly down Jordan's trimness and thought the gesture was explanation enough. "I don't know," he said.

"You know. Give, my friend, give."

"I said I don't. But the sergeant was talking to the inspectors' bureau before he sent me to relieve you. When he hung up he said, 'Send Lover Boy back here, and tell him to hump it.'" The relief gave Jordan a sidelong glance. "So maybe you know."

A girl in the crosswalk crowd said, "Hi, Ron." She was a chick from the office building on Berkeley below Trimount. Ron said, "Hi, honey," and answered her smile, and absently watched her tick-tock gait as she walked away from him. At the curb she looked back and smiled again.

Jordan put his whistle in his pocket. "It's all yours."

At the station, Sergeant Gillchrist said, "Get down to the inspectors' bureau. Report to Captain Sline, and hightail it."

"What for?" Jordan asked, again.

The sergeant put his lips against his teeth and sucked in air. It was a gesture; it meant suction—pull, influence. Gillchrist thought Jordan was finagling a transfer to the bureau. Rookies under a year in the department didn't get into the bureau, even as clerks. Not without pull. The sergeant thought it was pull, the relief thought Jordan was in trouble over a girl. So neither of them really knew anything.

The inspectors' bureau was high in the chopped-up warren atop the City Hall building. It was strange territory.

Jordan knew the two men in the captain's office because they were who they were. He had never seen either up close before. Captain Sline, the broad one, sat behind his desk, his back more rigid than the clerk's had been. The other one, the little one with the quick, burning, black eyes and the hat on, was Shorty Eglin. Chief Inspector Bernard Eglin of the homicide detail. They said he didn't like the Shorty and he didn't like the Bernard; so everybody called him Ben Eglin. He sat slumped and loose as a sleeping child, so very loose that Jordan knew he was doing it because he was even more taut inside than the other man. They were talking when Jordan came in. They looked at him and then at each other, leaving some question suspended in the air between them.

"I'm Jordan. You wanted me?"

"You took your sweet time," Eglin said.

Jordan looked at him. The pressure was infecting Jordan, too, making him sore at the relief with his puckered mouth, sore at Gillchrist who wasn't going any higher and so found pull in the promotion of every other cop. Ron was sore at this little man with the raspy voice, the hot eyes and sardonic lips. Jordan said to himself, You're an ugly runt with a reputation and so you shove rookies around. I ought to call you Shorty to your face. Aloud he said, "I came as soon as I was told to."

Eglin grunted and looked at the captain. The question was between them again. Jordan wondered if he should have talked back to the inspector. Eglin had no say-so in traffic and couldn't touch him. Maybe Captain Sline could, though. Jordan said to himself, Remember your own rules. Keep your nose clean.

Sline turned to the rookie. "So you're a lady's man," he said.

"He don't look it," said Eglin. "What's he got?"

The relief guessed right, then. Jordan was in trouble over some girl. But it didn't add up. There wasn't any girl down on him. There wasn't any girl who had cause to be down on him. He didn't fool around with the kind that hollered; they were no good for anybody.

Sline said, "Know a girl named Elsa Berkey? Name mean anything?"

"No," said Jordan quickly. Maybe too quickly, but it was the truth.

"A man named Bart Berkey?"

"No."

"A man named Joe Crider?"

"If it's the cigar-store guy, I know who he is. I don't know him."

The silence between the two men at the desk started again. Ease worked through Jordan. No one was accusing him. Joe Crider was in jail for investigation of murder. The murder of a cop – Bob Garfield, a young beat patrolman. Joe Crider was the owner of the biggest cigar-store chain in town. Garfield had been found in an alley alongside of one of Crider's cigar stores not a half-dozen blocks from the City Hall. There'd been a hole in his chest and a .32 slug in his spine.

For two days the papers had been full of it. Station talk centered around it. One drop of blood had put Joe Crider behind bars. One drop of the dead officer's blood. dripped on the sidewalk an inch beyond the sill of the alley entrance to Crider's cigar store. Everybody said Garfield must have been killed in the store and carried out that entrance and dumped in the alley.

Now that the captain had brought up Crider's name, the names of the other two fell in place. Elsa and Bart Berkey, sister

and brother, clerked for Crider. They were in jail, too.

The captain said slowly to Eglin. "If it went wrong I'd take the fall, not you."

"Name another way," challenged Eglin.

"A little faster footwork out of you and your boys might've helped. It might even have uncovered some blood inside that store."

Eglin's expression said that didn't deserve an answer. Jordan wondered about Sline's statement. No blood in the store? They hadn't heard about any of this in Traffic.

"Suppose we flub it," Sline went on. "We flub it and Crider — or somebody — kills young Berkey. We lose our only witness against Crider, unless the girl does know something — and I doubt it."

"Name another way," repeated Eglin inexorably. "And if Jordan here is as cute as he thinks he is, he'll get something out of the dame that'll be of some value to us. Let the three of them free to roam around. If we're going to get something on any of them, it's got to be under cover."

Jordan didn't get much of it. But the piece Eglin just recited was plain enough. It didn't smell good. They needed a cop who was fast with women, and they thought Jordan was their man. They wanted him to con some dame; to be bait for the hook.

It was cheap stuff. Jordan liked women too much for that. It was no go. When they gave him a chance, he'd tell them so.

Eglin looked impatiently at his wrist watch. "Time's running out," he said. "Dammit, Frank, we settled this once."

"I still don't like it," the captain said. "Young Berkey knows something and as soon as he walks out of here, his life's in danger."

"We gave him his chance to talk. What are we going to do? What do you want us to do, Sline? Tuck him in every night?"

"If there was any other way I wouldn't touch it. Maybe, if it was anybody but a cop that was killed, I wouldn't touch it. I don't know . . ." His voice trailed off, then came back strong. "Let's run 'em through. The girl first."

Eglin shot out of his chair and through a door behind him, yelling somebody's name as he went. Sline fired up a stubby pipe and looked at the wall, lost in thought. Time was running him to earth; a year, maybe two, and there would be a little retirement ceremony in the chief's office and Captain Sline would be all done. When it's that close, big decisions can come hard.

"Somebody's got me wrong," Jordan said. "I don't cuddle tramps."

"Keep your shirt on," said the captain.

In a minute Eglin was back. The tension was out of him.

"I still can't figure what women see in you," he said to Jordan.

"Maybe he's the quiet type," said Sline. "The kind that slips up on their blind side."

"Maybe he just talks a good game," said Eglin.

"Maybe," said Jordan, "you can go to hell."

The captain looked up thoughtfully. Ben Eglin grinned.

A cop in plain clothes came through the door Eglin had used. He was about ten years older than Jordan; thirty-six, say. Well dressed, round-faced, with that cold expression all the others had.

Eglin spoke to him. "Tague, this is Jordan. He's the one we picked for the girl."

Tague seemed to know what was expected of him. He had Jordan follow him into the adjoining room.

Eglin called after Jordan, "Get yourself a good look."

Tague held the door until Jordan came through, then moved over to its hinged side. He pulled the door toward him until a crack opened between door and jamb on the hinged side.

"This is your box seat," he said.

He pulled up a chair, motioned Jordan into it and killed the light. Sitting down, Jordan found that by leaning his head to the right he could see through the crack to Sline at his desk, and Eglin beyond.

Jordan heard the captain say, "Garfield was a wrong one. He shouldn't have been a cop."

"But he was a cop. A cop on duty." Eglin was unaccountably sharp.

"I know, I know," said Sline irritably. "You're not the only man in the department that feels it."

Eglin grunted. Silence settled in the next room.

It gave Jordan time to think. He needed it. He was in trouble now, if he hadn't been before. They were going to burn plenty when he told them no soap. He should have told the captain straight out. The way it sounded, Crider and the other two were going to be turned loose. And then Jordan was supposed to con the girl. If he did, he would be what Eglin and Sline thought he was, a hit-and-run guy with women.

Already, somebody else thought that. Sline's search through the department looking for a smoothie with dames, and somebody told him Ron Jordan was his man. Well, they had him wrong. He wasn't a chaser. He didn't have to chase. Women liked him; he liked women. That was all, and what was wrong with that? He played with women who knew the score. The married ones, and the dewy-eyed innocents, he left strictly alone.

A door was opened in the next room. A voice said, "In here, Miss Berkey."

He heard Captain Sline say, "Did the matron tell you this is bag and baggage for you?"

"Bag and baggage?" came Elsa

Berkey's low reply. "I don't understand."

There's the tipoff on her, thought Jordan. It was her voice. Deep and husky. Not unpleasant. But that throatiness told it. He didn't have to look at her to know she was a tramp. Gin and cigarettes did that to her voice. Mostly chain-smoking. It had put callouses on her vocal cords.

"It's jail talk," explained Sline. "Means you collect your things because you're going free."

She asked quickly, "Does that mean—are you freeing my brother, too?"

"We are," said Sline.

Ben Eglin said, "Go on, Elsa. Ask us if Joe Crider goes out, too." He wasn't polite like Sline. "That's what's on your mind, isn't it?"

"I wondered," she said.

"He goes out," said Sline. "All three of you. We can't hold you any longer without filing a charge, and we haven't the evidence. You knew that."

"No," she said. "I didn't know that."

She was lobbing them back quietly; there was something subdued about her that did not fit her voice. Jordan took a look. She was standing before Sline's desk, legs together, body poised in natural balance. Long red hair that picked up a gleam from the light above her. A regular profile, with high cheekbones shadowing the hallows below, the lips compressed too tight. Something about her puzzled him.

Sline spoke again. "We never intended to file a charge against you. It's Joe Crider we want. You could have helped us. You didn't. We have to remember that."

She pulled her eyes away from Sline's and sent a quick, careful gaze about the room. Jordan got a glimpse of gray eyes. The voice and the eyes told Jordan enough. He had her pegged. The puzzling thing, the thing about her that Jordan couldn't see though he knew he was looking right at it—what the devil was it?

"It's not too late for you to straighten out your story," said Eglin. "Things have a way of popping up. Suppose we find a witness who saw a woman of your height and build going into Crider's School Street store at around ten o'clock that night. That would mean you were there when Crider shot Garfield, wouldn't it?"

She turned a little, studying his bland and ugly face. "I was home," she said.

Sline broke in, impatient with Eglin. "There's another matter, Miss Berkey. We're worried about your brother."

Her attention came quickly back to Sline. He went on, "If Crider killed Garfield—and he did—your brother helped him. Or at least saw it. You know that. Bart was there, and admits he was there. You say you were not. That would

make Bart the only eye-witness who could ever testify against Crider. Crider might want to do something about that."

They let that soak in, giving her the fixed-stare business with it. This was what they had been leading up to, planting the fear in her.

"We don't want a second killing," continued Sline. "We'd like to hold Bart for his own protection. But our hands are tied. You and Bart tied 'em. Now let me give you some advice. Don't try to leave town, because you might need friends, and we're your friends whether you know it or not. And stop working for Joe Crider, both of you. It'd just be giving Crider more chance to knife you."

"But I—" She stopped, then went on coolly, "May I go now?"

"Wait for your brother," said Sline. "One of the boys will run you both home in a police car. We're going to deliver you safe. Then you won't be our responsibility any more."

She turned and walked out without a word, Jordan's gaze following her slim hips. He couldn't tell too much about her age—she might be twenty-five, she might be thirty. And that elusive quality about her, that thing that he was so close to seeing . . .

In the other room Captain Sline said, "I can't make up my mind about her."

"I can," said Eglin. He was venomous. "Crider's woman."

"I don't know. If she was his woman she wouldn't be putting in eight hours behind the counter at his store."

"See here, Frank," said Eglin. "Why don't you come out with it?" He was suddenly, harshly explosive. "You and the chief and the commissioners think Garfield was taking. You figure Garfield was knocking down from Crider on his bookmaking. You think he tried to hike the ante and got himself killed for it. You won't say so because you don't want the public to hear about a crooked police officer. That's why you're bucking me on a cop killer. And you're all dead wrong!"

"Nobody's bucking you, Ben," said Sline mildly. "You're all steamed up because we've got to let Crider go."

"It won't wash," Eglin went on. "You ought to know Crider better than that. He knows how we feel about a cop killer. The last guy in the world he would kill would be a cop, if he used his head."

"He was using his head," put in Sline dryly. "He used it so well you couldn't make a case on him."

"He's using it now. But he wasn't when he shot Garfield. And what does that mean? A cool customer like Crider—what would make him go off his rocker? The dame that just walked out of here! Maybe Garfield was taking; I don't know. But he didn't go too far until he tried to take Crider's girl. Probably she made a play for him. She got

Garfield killed, and I'll bet a month's pay she was there when it happened."

The far door opened and a young fellow was pushed in. A kid, really. Jordan figured him to be about sixteen. He was dragging his left leg —a club foot. He came slowly up to the desk.

Sline said abruptly, "Bart, we're turning you loose."

"Yeah," said Eglin. "Take good care of yourself. Lock your door nights."

Bart Berkey looked from one to the other. He had dark, deepset eyes that turned in upon himself, high cheekbones like his sister, and a weak face. He was scared, of Eglin more than the captain. He pulled jerkily at a cigarette.

"We're letting Crider loose, too," said Sline. "He'll be coming around to see you. What you going to tell him?"

"I—" Bart swallowed.

Eglin didn't let him get any farther. "You going to tell him you almost cracked? You going to tell him you almost put the whole thing on the line for us? You're not going to do that, are you, Bart? You know what he would do to you, don't you?"

It was nice teamwork. The old one-two. Against the girl they couldn't work it well. But it was working on Bart.

"I told you the truth!" Bart burst out. "I didn't do anything. I didn't see anything. Elsa knows I didn't."

Jordan saw the glisten of tears. Still, you couldn't despise him too much. That club foot had beaten him and shaped him; he was just a kid without the stuff to overcome it. Bart hung his head. For him, there was an object of terror somewhere that was more fearful even than Ben Eglin.

Sline punched at him. "Crider is going to worry about you. You're his soft spot. You're the one that might let your tongue slip. He's going to think about that, but one day he'll make up his mind and start looking for you."

"It'll be too late then," Eglin nodded. "We won't be around to wipe your nose." His voice changed, became brutal. "Your sister is waiting for you. Get out!"

Bart Berkey left. There was another wait, during which Sline and Eglin exchanged low-voiced growls. Jordan still had the girl on his mind.

The far door opened again and Joe Crider walked into the room. He was a trim, compact man with a good-humored mouth. A roundish face, not a line in it, matched the gray at his temples. He wore rimless glasses, the lenses cut almost square, reflecting the overhead light, blanking out his eyes, making them shiny apertures without depth. He was smiling when he turned to look across at Sline and down at Eglin. A man sure of himself, sure he had won. But his cigarette was long, newly lighted.

He had fired up just outside the door and taken one deep drag to relieve the tension inside of him.

"Well, Inspector," he said. His words came flat and soft. "Is this good-bye?"

Sline gave the reply. "You go out," he said. "But don't go far. We're not through with you."

"So?" said Crider. "I get ridden, eh? You make it a bad job and you're sore, so you ride Joe Crider. How long?"

"It was a cop you killed," Eglin snapped.

Crider took the hand from his pocket and raised it, palm up. "Why? Why should I want to kill Bob Garfield?"

"Bart Berkey knows," said Eglin. "And we'll know when Bart figures out he's being a chump. He'll come crawling back to tell us the rest of it. That's why we ride you, Crider. And if something happens to Berkey, we're not going to sit on our behinds, we're going to pin it on you. Just you bear that in mind."

Ron Jordan got the full force of it, then. Eglin had been systematically setting them all on edge, pitting them one against the other, as a means of making something happen that would break the Garfield killing. And ladies-man Jordan had a noble part to play. He was to be the observer—the buzzard flying overhead. He must con the girl to stay close inside, be in a position to report whatever happened. Jordan saw it all now.

Ben Eglin stared at Crider and played out his perfidy, that might mean the life of Bart Berkey. Crider turned his head to examine the half-open door; the glare on his glasses gave Jordan the queer impression that opaque, depthless eyes were fixed on him. Slowly Crider brought his attention around to Sline, studying him, then to Eglin.

"Let's stop horsing each other," he said. "Bart's a kid. He couldn't stand up to you. If he had known anything, you'd have got it out of him. Now tell me, why with the cop-pressure off, should he suddenly start talking?"

"That's right," said Eglin, ignoring Crider's question. "He couldn't stand up to me. You should have seen him cry like a baby and call for his sister when I hammered at him about a woman being in your joint that night."

Eglin dropped it there, left it to Crider to figure what might have been added but wasn't. Bart Berkey had almost broken. Eglin didn't have long enough to work on him. Eglin couldn't hold him any longer without filing a charge, and Bart didn't confess enough to make a charge stick. That was what Crider was supposed to think. It was clear, without Eglin coming out and saying it, that Bart was so weak his silence couldn't be depended on and that he was the kind of a kid who might crack at any time.

Captain Sline stood up. "All right, Crider," he said. "You can go, now."

Before the door closed on Crider, he looked back, smiling. The last little trick was his. And maybe all tricks. Jordan couldn't for the life of him figure out under which one of the three Sline and Eglin had set the keg of dynamite.

This was the time for Jordan to count himself out. They couldn't touch him for it. There was nothing in the manual that said a traffic cop could be ordered to do a job on a woman.

Crossing toward Sline he said, "I tried to tell you, Captain—"

"Tell it later, Jordan," broke in Eglin. "Go change to a suit and pack a bag. Then come back to homicide. I'll be there. You're moving in across the hall from her tonight."

Jordan came on. He told himself, Don't look at Ben Eglin. Don't look in those eyes or he's got you. He looked down at Sline's desk. The ash tray there had two stubs in it. One butt was Bart Berkey's, the other was Crider's. If Elsa Berkey were a chain smoker she would have needed a smoke when Eglin was working her over. But she hadn't smoked. That was the thing that didn't fit. Her throaty voice was natural.

Sline spoke. "What did you try to tell me, Jordan?"

"Nothing. Only—only you didn't ask me if I would."

Eglin came around the corner of the desk. "How long have you been in the department, Jordan?"

"A bit over a year."

"That's long enough. You should know when a police officer is murdered, a chunk of you dies, too. You should know if a cop killer ever got away with it, it would be open season on the department for every cheap gunman in town. You should know when a police officer is murdered, the wives of every one of us don't sleep nights, wondering if their man is next. You wouldn't think about the wives, would you? You don't know that kind of women." The voice sank, mimicking Jordan with a world of contempt, "'You didn't ask me if I would.' Godamighty!"

Ben Eglin spun on his heel and stalked out.

In the silence that followed, Captain Sline said, "You'd better run along now and pack."

2.

Ron Jordan stood in the middle of the strange living room. The couch's velour was a dirty brown, its nap slicked by time. The wood pieces bore the scars of conflict with a hundred tenants.

He said to himself, How did you get here and what do you do next?

He hadn't kept his nose clean. That was how he got here. He had

got himself tagged at headquarters as a lady killer, and now Ben Eglin was using him. He had to warm up the girl across the hall. That's what he had to do next. The world was full of floozies who didn't smoke.

In homicide, an hour ago, Ben Eglin had said, "We shook down the Berkey apartment while we had them here. Found nothing. The one across the hall was empty and we grabbed it. The landlady knows who you are. We'll have a phone in there by morning. There's no time tonight to fill you in on background. Come back here in the morning; get it then."

Jordan had got to the door with his bag when Eglin's voice reached for him again. "The games you play with that dame are police business, Jordan. You're going up there to get information out of her. Don't forget it."

Odd, how this little runt of a man could make Jordan forget the rule book. Jordan had snarled, "You're funny. When I want to have fun with a girl, she'll be one *I* pick."

This living room looked down three stories to the street. In front of him, as he stood, was a kitchenette-dinette. On his right, a bedroom. Then a bath. Then another bedroom. Two bedrooms. That might need explaining. Why would he need two bedrooms? He could tell her he had to find an apartment quick, and this was all he could find. Or he could work up a leer and let it answer for him.

He stepped into the kitchenette. He opened the refrigerator aimlessly, seeing the heavy coat of frost around the coils, arriving slowly at an idea. The freezer control was a knob that turned in a half circle from "off" through numerals to five. He worked on the knob for several minutes, and it came off in his hand. He dropped it into a drawer, then went across the hall, smiling.

He rapped four times at her door, trying to make his knuckles talk briskly rather than alarmingly. "Who is it?"

"Your new neighbor," he said.

Silence again. After a time she repeated, "Who?"

He caught on. It was his voice she was studying. She wanted to hear it again, make sure whether she knew it.

He said quite loudly, "My name is Ron Jordan. I just moved in across the hall and I can't figure out how to defrost my refrigerator."

The door opened three inches; a night chain caught it there. Her face was wary and hostile.

"Sorry." He smiled. "It is kind of late, isn't it? But I thought maybe you had the same kind of refrigerator as mine and could show me what gadget to turn. I've been fooling with it for ten minutes and it's got me whipped."

She studied him coldly. He kept

his smile, feeling a stiffness in his lips. The great lover—yeah! She was going to close the door in his face.

"Bart," she called. Then to Jordan; "Just a minute."

He heard the murmur of voices, then the chain dropped and the door came open. Bart stood behind her, his mouth sullen.

"I'm Ron Jordan," Jordan repeated, catching her guarded glance down the hall.

"I'm Elsa Berkey. This is my brother Bart. Why didn't you call the landlady?"

"You know how it is. You start griping the first day you're in, and you get tabbed as a complaining tenant." He grinned. "I always wait 'til the second day."

Still unsmiling, she said, "Come on, Bart." She closed her door carefully. The night latch clicked again. They crossed and entered behind Jordan.

She took one look in the refrigerator, said, "No wonder. The knob's gone," and began rummaging in the drawers. In a moment she came up with it, stuck it on its spindle and turned the control to the "off" position. "There," she said. "Leave it off 'til morning."

He said in genuine surprise, "How did you know where it was?"

"Any woman would know." She had resumed her study of him in this stronger light. Her eyes were gray, under quite dark eyebrows. A hard gray, and suspicious. She said, "You just moved in?"

"Just tonight. I took it yesterday, but didn't have time to get my stuff over from the hotel. The company transferred me from St. Louis last week. I sell."

"Sell what?"

"Exterminator chemicals. You know. Terminate the termites. Roust the rats."

It was moderately safe ground with him. Once he had worked six months for a pest-control company. And it got a small smile out of her.

She said, "Your wife coming out later after you get settled?"

"No wife. No kids. No nothing."

She looked at Bart through a long, thoughtful silence. When she turned back to Jordan she gave him a smile. "I think we should welcome the new neighbor with a drink."

The Berkey apartment was identical with his, laid out in reverse. But different. The living room was freshly painted, a soft chartreuse that fought the gloom. Wall to wall carpeting—a dark green. A gay slip cover hid the ugliness of the couch. The one big chair, too. She guided him toward it, saying, "You don't mind bourbon?"

"Does a fish mind water?"

He couldn't have been more trite. But she laughed. Her smile said, "You're handsome and witty and I think I'm going to like you a lot." He couldn't figure it. She hadn't

looked this easy to him. Too bad this was strictly police business. She was a trim little schooner, and he liked her jib, too.

Bart Berkey was bothered. He had slumped down at one end of the couch. His eyes were puzzled as they followed his sister.

Jordan said to him, "What do you do?"

"Nothin' right now." He spoke resentfully. He didn't like Jordan's presence here. Jordan barely noticed. He was thinking. So they took the advice. They're not working for Crider any more.

Elsa returned with three glasses in her hands. One was a different color; it looked like tomato juice. She handed it to Bart.

Jordan stood up and took his.

She took a sip, smiled at him, and moved around behind his chair to the front window. Jordan started to sit down. But he couldn't very well sit with his back to her. He joined her as she raised the window blind.

"Why, it's raining!" she said.

It wasn't actually, he saw. The night sky was depositing something less than a shower, something more than a fog. It was enough to make the streets gleam darkly, and to blur the outline of cars a block away. In this apartment-house district there was never enough garage space. He could see at least a dozen cars parked for the night. Ben Eglin might have a couple of men in one of them. They might be watching this window, seeing him, at this moment. Well, they could report to Eglin that he had made the grade.

Working on his bourbon, he wondered if Ben Eglin gave all his men that Fourth of July oration about cop killers? Remembering it, remembering Eglin's intensity, Jordan felt again a tingling in his nerve ganglia, and resented it. It was like some high-school halfback being hopped up by his coach. If Bob Garfield was taking, he was a crook like any other crook. The department would snare his killer, sure. But they didn't have to pull a man off traffic to do it.

Bart interrupted his thoughts. He said, "I'm going to bed."

"Sleep tight, Bart," said Elsa.

Jordan massaged his chin, thoughtfully. A man's afraid of an attack, he doesn't go merrily off to bed. It'd be especially true in the case of a nervous kid like Bart. You'd expect him to be at the window, furtively peeking out, not being able to pull himself away.

Bart stopped at the door of the bedroom nearest the kitchen and sent his sister a questioning look. Jordan saw it, saw the puzzlement that remained on his face as he dragged his foot through and closed the door. Something had Bart scared. But if it wasn't Crider, what was it? Elsa's tone with her brother made Jordan smile. Her throaty voice held the gentle reassurance a grownup uses with a

small child. He hadn't seen her give Bart the high sign to get out of the living room. But he knew she had done it.

"Do you know our town?" she asked.

"I've been here before," he said.

"I hate it!" she said vehemently.

"Hate it? Why?"

She brought her gaze around to him, a little off balance, a little confused. "I didn't intend to say that." She smiled. That slow, cozy smile again. "You know how it is. Some nights you feel jumpy and restless."

"Yeah, I know," he said. He knew some other things, too. All of a sudden he knew. Why she was giving him the business. Why she drew him to the window. Why she held him there with small talk. She thought Joe Crider might be down there on the street. The cops had instilled a strong fear of Crider in her. She wanted Crider to see, if he was down there, that she had a man with her. She had protection for Bart.

It was a laugh. Who was conning who? Jordan hadn't done anything. He hadn't had a chance. Not even for an opening pass at her. If he had had two heads, it would have been the same. Protection for Bart. For all he knew, Bart might have gone off to bed because he and Crider had been in on the killing together, and it wasn't Crider at all who was troubling him.

He left the window and dropped to the couch. Now that he knew all the ground rules, he could relax. He drained his glass as she came across and held it out. "Same size, same color, hm?"

He didn't get up when she came back with it. "When you get caught up with your chores you can come over and fix up my living room like this."

"There's nothing to it," she said. "Bart did the painting. I bought the slip covers. My kid brother's awfully handy."

He reached up with his right hand and after the briefest of hesitations she came down beside him.

"Gray eyes and red hair," he said. "I'm a sucker for 'em."

"You are? I like blue eyes in a man. Really dark blue. Yours are dark blue, aren't they?"

He reached across her shoulders and pulled her to him. Eglin, you picked the right man. He put his mouth on hers. You sure did, Eglin. Then he was thinking, I ought to bite your lips until that cold blood of yours came and made them really red. That blood so cold you think of using your sex to pull in a perfect stranger and put him between a killer's gun and your punk of a brother.

There was a quick knock at the door.

Elsa broke away and jumped to her feet. Jordan came up, too. The knock was repeated. Bart came out of his bedroom in pajamas and no robe, stood there looking scared.

"Elsa!"

That was a woman's voice, coming distantly through the door.

"Oh," said Elsa. She turned toward Jordan, giving a little laugh of nervous relief. She came to him, her handkerchief in her hand, and wiped her lipstick from his mouth. Bart shot a look of pure hatred at Jordan.

Elsa went to the door, calling through it, "Gloria, is that you?"

"Yes, it's me."

"Are you alone?"

"I sure am, honey."

As the door opened, a small, rounded figure burst in. "Oh, Elsa, I came just as soon as I heard they'd turned you—" She saw Jordan and stopped abruptly, her look of compassion turning to a bright, questioning smile.

"Miss Hume," said Elsa. "Mr. Ron Jordan, our new neighbor."

"Why, hello there," said Gloria. She came to him and held up her hand for him to take. She was the cuddly type, curvy at bosom and hip. Brown eyes that were soft and round and innocent didn't go at all with her opal earrings in their intricate gold setting. She saw Bart and said, "Oh, Bart, did I get you up? I'm awfully sorry."

"Naw, I was awake," said Bart.

He didn't like Gloria, and didn't mind showing it. Jordan thought, He hates everybody but his sister and himself.

Bart limped back into his bedroom slowly.

Elsa said hurriedly, "Ron just moved in today. He's from St. Louis."

"Today? Then he—does he—" Gloria stopped.

Elsa said, again quickly, "Let me get you a drink."

"No, honey. I can only stay a minute. I just ran in to say hello and to hear about—" She stopped again, making heavy going of it, shooting quick little glances at Jordan. She tried a new direction, "Have you seen Joe since—"

"No," said Elsa.

"But you're going to, aren't you? I mean, honey, you've got your job and all. You can't let something like this get you down. Why, hundreds of innocent people have been locked up and pushed around by policemen! You're not the—" She stopped and put her hand to her mouth. "Oh, Elsa," she wailed. "Me and my big mouth."

She was as deliberate about it, thought Jordan, as a cabbie jumping a signal light. And pretty good at acting, too. The eyes she showed Jordan swam with contrition and self-accusation, all but hiding the sharp curiosity behind them.

Elsa was watching him, too. She said to him defiantly, "A policeman was killed near the cigar store where my brother and I worked. Bart and I were arrested and—and put in jail for two days. They let us go this afternoon."

Jordan tried for the casual touch. "It happens every day in St. Louis."

"Let's not talk about it," said Elsa.

"That's what she came for—to talk about it!"

It was Bart. He stood again at his bedroom door, a robe over his pajamas.

"Bart!" said Elsa.

"I don't care, Sis. Why did she have to come? She knows she's got no business coming here." His voice rose, riding out of control. "I didn't tell them anything! I didn't know anything! That's what she came for. To find out for him! To find out what I told them."

Elsa reached him just as his face twisted and the tears came. He backed away from her into his bedroom, pointing at Jordan. "Why is he here, too? Why does he have to be here?"

Elsa followed and closed the bedroom door behind them.

"Poor kid," said Gloria. "Whatever did the police do to him?"

"Worked him over, I guess. Tough on his sister. We'd better go."

"Uh-hm," said Gloria absently, staring at the bedroom door. She took Jordan's drink from his hand, downed a gulp and handed it back to him. "Say, you walked into something, didn't you?"

"It beats killing rats."

That startled her. She said, "Huh?"

Elsa came out. She looked suddenly spent. Yet an expression close to tenderness was on her face fleetingly before she closed Bart's door behind her. Damn the woman! She wasn't simple enough.

"I'm sorry," she said. "He's—"

"Forget it, kid," said Gloria. "Your friend Jordan and I will run along."

Jordan asked, "Is there a night drug store close? I need tooth paste." It was true. He needed a brush and a razor, too. Always he forgot to pack things.

"The next block down on your right," said Elsa. She threw a quick glance at Gloria. It was accusing. Hostile, even. She thought Gloria made a fast steal while she was in the bedroom with Bart.

Gloria got it, too. Jordan caught another under-the-eyelids appraisal from her. If it wasn't in her mind before, it was now. But she said definitely, speaking of herself in the third person and to both of them, "Gloria needs her sleep. Gloria's headed straight for bed."

Jordan let Gloria make her goodbye small talk and go out ahead of him. From the hall she said to Elsa, "See you at work tomorrow."

Elsa Berkey shook her head vaguely. It wasn't quite no, and it wasn't yes.

As Jordan passed Elsa he said. "I'll be back in a minute."

"No." She hesitated, fixing her gaze on the knot of his tie. "Ron . . . I'm not . . ." She stopped. started again, "Come to dinner tomorrow night, will you?"

"Sure. I'll bring steaks. Three

filets," he said, and smiled.

Walking down the hall he thought, You poor fish, what got into you? She would spend her last dime for the finest steaks in town just to get you back. All she was thinking of was little boy Bart's future protection.

Gloria was waiting in front of the automatic elevator. It clanked up as Jordan arrived. They entered and he pushed the down button.

She said, "What did you mean by that rat-killing crack?"

"That's the business I'm in, baby. Not human rats—the things that crawl. You got any you want killed?" He put a finger under her chin, lifting her face. "Pretty baby," he said, and kissed her. All in line of duty, he thought, while his lips stayed on hers. Eglin wouldn't mind. He'd okay his conning Gloria.

The elevator came to a stop. She said, "I'm not that easy."

That was it. That was what Elsa had started to say just as he was leaving, then didn't. She didn't because she knew he wouldn't swallow it. She had kissed him back. And Gloria had kissed him back. And Bart thought Joe Crider had sent Gloria. Things were whirling merrily.

Gloria left him at the drug store. And as Jordan made his purchases, he thought of the razor ads in which sexy gals ran their hands ecstatically over the freshly shaven faces of men. This assignment did require that he look his best, he told himself, and then felt annoyance that he should feel the need for this justification. The thought came and he couldn't dismiss it, that dead men were shaved and lotioned before being deposited in their coffins.

3.

Ben Eglin had a long, narrow cubbyhole off the homicide detail room.

"They're both in the apartment," said Jordan, "or were when I left this morning. And some salesman or other came."

Eglin nodded. "Who was the other girl you mentioned?"

"Name's Gloria Hume. Bart thought Crider sent her. I do, too. Last night everybody was conning everybody. It was great."

Eglin wrote down the name. He pushed across an open folder file. It was almost two inches thick. "Read it," he said. "Take it out in the detail room."

Jordan picked up the file. He felt Eglin's eyes on him steadily. It was a somehow different stare, not pushing or demanding. Jordan stared back resentfully. To his surprise Eglin dropped his gaze.

Looking down at the desk, Eglin said, "How did you manage it so fast with the Berkey girl?"

Jordan grinned at Eglin's male

curiosity. "Trade secret," he said.

In the detail room he took the first empty desk he found. There were a half-dozen men around, some on the telephone, some writing. Eglin's detail. They knew who he was and what he was doing. And they seemed contemptuous of him.

He opened the folder and riffled through the file. This was his first look at a murder file. Report of the coronor's deputies. The autopsy surgeon's report. Photographs. Measurements on the position of Bob Garfield's body. A question and answer statement of the citizen who looked down the alley by chance and first saw the body. Maps. Measurements on the interior of Crider's cigar store. Ballistics on a .32 calibre bullet. A pathologist's finding on submitted samples. Reports by Inspectors Tague, Barry, Furlong, Maloof; there were others. And statements. A great sheaf of question and answer statements, free and voluntary, by Crider, Elsa Berkey, Bart Berkey and somebody named James Lombard. All taken by Bernard Eglin, chief homicide inspector.

At the end of an hour Jordan was only half finished but he had, for the first time, a physical picture of the murder scene in his mind. And he began to understand a little of Ben Eglin's rage.

Crider called it Store No. 1 because he started there. It fronted on School. Alongside it ran Romar Terrace, which was an alley dignified by a name. The store had two rooms. The front was typical — cigars, cigarettes, candy and gum racks, magazine racks, three pinball machines, a claw machine, shaving gear, paper back novels. The other room was directly behind. Shelves for storage. A desk in a corner that Crider sometimes used. A long table. And five telephones. A side door opened from this back room onto the alley. You stepped directly out to the narrow sidewalk. There, in the gutter opposite the door, Bob Garfield's body lay. And there, on the sidewalk an inch beyond the sill, the one drop of Garfield's blood was found.

Garfield lay on his back, stretched at length. His cap was a foot from his head. His service revolver was holstered and unfired. Blood stained his blouse around the single chest wound. But there was no blood beneath him. No blood around him. No blood anywhere except that single drop. Garfield had not died there at all.

There was no blood in the store, anywhere—floors, walls, furniture or stock—according to the pathologist. Jordan could see in the reports the mounting fury of Eglin as he sent his men back to search again and again. No blood—and without it no proof, beyond that single drop, that Garfield had been killed in the store and his body carried out to the alley.

Jordan turned to the question and

answer statements. Crider first. They had found him in bed at two that morning. His statement was taken at three. He was cool and seemingly frank. No, he owned no gun. Yes, he was there that night. He made it a habit to drop around to his stores just before closing time. Bart Berkey was just shutting up shop when Crider reached Store No. 1. Crider checked the cash register. They turned off the lights and said good night at the door. That was all. A quiet night. He didn't see Bob Garfield. Or anyone else.

Those five telephones were his bookie business—he wouldn't try to kid Inspector Eglin. His clerks took horse bets at every store except No. 1. They passed them along by phone to the back room of Store No. 1. James Lombard took them there. No, Lombard was not there that night. He left at seven.

Pay ice to Bob Garfield? Inspector Eglin should know better than that. The clerks were paid to take their chances. Sometimes they got knocked over by the department. Look at the arrest records; they prove it. The business wasn't worth protection money. Garfield was clean, and a friend. Was Garfield interested in Elsa Berkey? Maybe. Who wouldn't be? She was a good-looking red-head. Me? No, thanks—a smart man never fools around with his own women employees.

That was the meat of Crider's first statement. Underneath it was another, and another. And yet another. Eglin wouldn't give up. But Crider's fourth story didn't vary from his first.

Next, Elsa Berkey. She was more terse than Crider. She volunteered nothing. She answered carefully. Started working for Crider two years ago. Before that a singer in a night club. That throaty voice should do all right with a blues song. Six months ago she got Bart a job with Crider. She opened Store No. 1 in the morning, Bart closed it at night.

She knew Bob Garfield. She had gone out with him. How many times? Three, perhaps four. They were just friends. Did he mention the telephones in the back room? No. Positive, Miss Berkey? Of course. No, there was nothing between her and Crider. There never had been. He was her employer.

Come now, Miss Berkey. The facts are against you. You admit you got Bart his job. Bart isn't what you'd call good material for a cigar-store clerk. Crider would never have hired him if there hadn't been something in it for Crider.

There was a bargain, but not that kind. A pretty girl helped business in a store where the customers were men. She knew hundreds of them by their first names. They bought there because of her. Bart had a good mind. But he was—well, he lived in a shell. She knew she had to make him break out of

it. She had to make him meet people, deal with people. She asked Crider to put him to work. Crider refused. She quit. She thought that would make Crider give Bart a job. It did. Bart got the job on the condition that she come back.

Jordan stopped reading. She used her sex, all right, to get Bart a job. But it was the way she said, not the way Eglin said. It was just like last night, he thought, when she used her sex on me in an attempt to protect Bart. Everything she does is for Bart.

Then he knew what had happened to him. He had started believing her. Why? Maybe it was the cool, honest way she used her sex, without pretense or hypocrisy. He went back to the file, reading rapidly. There wasn't much more. She was in bed when Bart came home that night. She heard him but she did not look at the clock.

Bart Berkey's fear came through the very first words of his first statement. The stenographer taking it down had asked him to speak louder. Eglin had been reassuring. Eglin told him he had nothing to fear.

Bart was telling Crider's story—the exact same story. Eglin had turned harsh. A fourth statement had been taken that night. A fifth at nine the next morning. Eglin was pitiless. A sixth and last had been taken yesterday. The time was just one hour before the old relief, Dennehy, had walked out into the intersection at Berkeley and Trimount and told Jordan he was wanted at the station.

As Jordan dug into this last statement the cold words took on tension and the scene came alive. He could see Eglin leaning forward, pinning the frightened Bart to the chair with those eyes.

Q: Your sister's no good, Berkey. She messes up men. You going to let her go on getting you in trouble all your life?

A: You've got no right to say that.

Q: No right. Then let's say she's not. Let's say she is a good girl but she was just having a little fun. But it got a man killed. Do you go to church, Bart?

A: Sometimes.

Q: Do you think a man has a right to lie about murder even to protect his own sister?

A: It wasn't . . . She didn't, Mr. Eglin. Oh, why don't you leave me alone!

Q: I'll leave you alone when I get the truth. Let's start all over. You were there. Bob Garfield was there—

A: No.

Q: Bob Garfield was there. And your sister was there. Garfield and your sister were in that back room together. Crider came in and caught 'em in a clinch and shot Garfield.

A: Elsa wasn't there!

Q: But Garfield was there, wasn't he?

A: I didn't say that!

Q: All right, Bart. Let's leave your sister out of it. Let's forget your sister. Let's say she wasn't there. That takes away your only excuse for not telling the truth.

A: I don't know what you mean.

Q: I mean I'm giving you one last chance to tell the truth. I'm putting it up to you in a way that you don't have a reason in the world for not coming clean. And if you don't I'm going to send you to the penitentiary as an accessory when I do get the facts, so help me! Now then. You were there. Garfield was there. A woman was there—

A: No!

Q: A woman was there. You don't have to give her a name, Bart. Elsa was home in bed, remember. A woman was there. Let's say for now she was a woman you never saw before and couldn't recognize in court—

A: No! I can't! I can't!

Q: The truth, Bart. Quickly now, the truth. A woman was there—

A: I can't! You don't know what it would mean. Elsa! I want my sister!

Jordan closed the file. A cold lump seemed to be revolving slowly in his stomach. A woman had been there.

He walked in and laid the file on Eglin's desk. The chief inspector looked up.

"Gloria Hume," said Eglin. "Here's the dope on her. Clerk in Crider's store at Avery and Mason. Been with him a year. Works from two in the afternoon till ten-thirty. Lives in an apartment five blocks from the Berkey's. What do you make of it?"

"Avery and Mason. That's a block south and a block east of the No. 1 store. Was it on Garfield's beat?"

"It was."

"Then she was the one." Eagerness filled Jordan. The cold lump began to dissolve. "She was at Store No. 1 that night. She got Garfield killed."

"Possible. But not likely."

"Why not? How often has Crider been seen going in her apartment? Has he bought her any jewelry and stuff? Has she ever been seen with Garfield?"

"Are you beginning to fancy yourself a detective, Jordan? We'll check those things as a matter of routine . . . No. You've let yourself forget the main fact. Bart wouldn't lie if his sister was in the clear."

"Maybe he didn't lie. How about last night? Crider sent Gloria up there as sure as you sent me."

"Probably. Could be he just wanted to know if the Berkeys were coming back to work. So he sent someone who knew them. Why are you suddenly so interested in clearing Elsa?"

"I just feel that you're dead wrong, Inspector," said Jordan. He spoke slowly. It was almost as though he were talking to himself,

arriving at a final judgment he had long delayed. "She's no better than she ought to be, but still she's honest and—Well, I've never met a girl like her."

Eglin gave him a long, thoughtful look. "That's the way it is? First Garfield. Now you. One dead cop isn't enough. Suppose you go back to your traffic corner."

"No." He spoke without thinking. That was what he had wanted once, but not now. "You assigned me to get the low-down on her. And I did. So?"

"Young cops," said Eglin. He spoke bitterly. "The Lord save the public from young cops."

Jordan felt annoyed. "Don't you want an honest report?"

Eglin said, "Where do you carry your gun?"

Jordan tapped his left armpit, looked puzzled.

Eglin nodded. "If you have to get it out, keep the Berkey woman in front of it. As a favor to me, Jordan."

4.

The steaks were nicely broiled. The meal was a man's meal, and relaxing. Even Bart's presence didn't spoil it. Elsa had probably done some talking to her brother since last night, told him that Ron Jordan from St. Louis might stand between him and a bullet.

During dessert abruptly Bart got up and started limping around the room. Something had him scared. It was working on him now.

"Bart, listen—" began Jordan. He stopped short, aware he had almost given himself away. He had almost told Bart to stop worrying.

He blurted, "You wash the dishes, Bart, and I'll dry. We'll show Elsa we appreciate good cooking, huh?"

"I'll do them," said Bart shortly.

Elsa sent Jordan a warning glance: Let Bart do them. It's something to occupy his time. He needs that.

She cleared the table, then came and sat beside Jordan on the couch. He took her hand; she pulled it away.

So that was the way it was going to be. He decided not to waste any time. "You're not what?" he said.

"I don't understand?"

"Last night as I was leaving, you were anxious to tell me that you were not something or other."

She answered quietly, "I'm not a kindergarten teacher any more. But I was once—for a year."

"Why did you quit?"

"Do you know what a school teacher's salary is?" She looked steadily into his eyes. "I'm no sweet and innocent young thing, Ron. You saw that last night."

He said, with a gentleness that surprised himself, "I want to hear it."

"The starting salary for a pro-

bationary teacher wasn't enough for two. I made more as a night-club singer, but not enough more. So I found a job where I waited on men and—used my looks to make selling easy and profitable. Until—" She dropped it there, smiling. "You see?"

"I see," he said. He looked at her eyes and marveled that he had ever thought them hard. He saw that the maternal instinct in her held the quality of fierceness: Bart was the kindergarten class that was denied her by whoever determined the low salaries paid to teachers.

She expected him to walk out now. It was plainly there in her expression.

Elsa said, "Ron?"

"Yes?"

"That trouble I told you about—the policeman who was murdered. It's not over. Bart knows something he hasn't told."

She was confiding in him, and he though of Eglin's crack about young cops. "What?" he asked.

"I don't know. Bart won't tell me what it is. He's terrified and—and I am, too."

"Why don't you go to the police?"

"I would but the man who was killed—I went out with him a few times. Bart is—well, you've seen. He's dependent upon me, and jealous. He didn't like this man, just as he doesn't like you. What if . . ." Her mouth trembled. "He couldn't have. He's just a lonely and wretched boy without anyone to turn to but me. There are dark places in his mind but not that kind. I know he couldn't have helped . . ."

The whisper dropped away to nothing. She did not need to finish. Jordan knew the rest of it. Did Bart help Joe Crider kill Garfield? That was what Eglin believed. That was what Elsa feared. He wondered if Bart had done the job himself. That would explain why he was not afraid of being attacked last night, his present troubled conscience.

She said quietly, "I've been using you, Ron. When you were a stranger I could do it and it didn't bother me much. Now I know you and I can't any more. You must leave. There's danger here."

He told himself that maybe she wasn't really trying to get rid of him. Maybe this was a more subtle play for his aid. She had adroitly taken the sex out of the situation; now she was appealing to his manhood. Angrily, he pushed away the thought. He was getting as bad as Ben Eglin.

"What kind of danger?" he asked.

"I'm not sure," she said. "But the man we worked for—"

She stopped when Bart came out of the kitchen.

"What is it, Bart?" asked Elsa.

"Nothing," he said defiantly.

"Bart, I've got an idea," said his sister. It was astonishing how sooth-

ing that husky voice could be. "Tomorrow you can start painting my room."

Bart straightened up. Animation came into his face. "Can I, Sis?" he said. He suddenly seemed a lot younger than he actually was. "Swell! I'll paint it that celadon green you like. I'll need a—" He stopped, his face unaccountably stricken.

Jordan caught Bart's tortured expression, wondered what Bart could possibly need that would affect him in this way.

Elsa hadn't noticed. She explained to Jordan, "Bart loves house-painting. He's good, too." Her pride was very apparent. "The owner of the store where we worked bought him some supplies and was going to let him paint the entire store. But then the — the trouble came up."

Jordan sat quite still, on the verge of discovery. Bart had been about to paint the store. Crider had bought him the supplies; they should have been in the store that night. But there was no word of painting supplies in those reports in the murder file. No listing of paint, or brushes . . . What else would a painter need? A ladder, a canvas to spread on the floor—That was it! A waterproofed canvas.

Elsa, Jordan saw, had not finished her speech extoling Bart. Bart was always making or fixing something. That cedar flower box, he'd put it together just out of scraps. By laying the living room carpet, he'd saved them the thirty-six dollars that the carpet men wanted to charge for the job. Just yesterday he was puttering with the carpet, hammering some nails in, though he'd finished with that job sometime ago. And there was a lamp shade that never—

Jordan got up, forcing himself to be casual as he took Elsa's hand again and led her to the door.

"I'll be back," he said. "Won't be long. Just a little while."

He felt sorry for her because of Bart. He felt sorry for himself because of what his knowledge would now compel him to do to her and her brother. He could not leave her like this. He leaned forward to kiss her, but she turned her head aside.

"You don't have to do that," she said.

To do a complete Judas job, he thought bitterly, the kiss was called for. "We'll save that for later then," he said, knowing that there would be no later.

He closed the door and stood there until he heard both night lock and chain slip into place. In his own apartment he flicked on the light and strode to the front window. He beat a path between the window and the telephone, trying to decide what to do. He knew he had no choice. He must pass on to Eglin, at once, the discovery that he had made. Eglin would want to send men searching for a

house painter's drop cloth stained with the blood of Bob Garfield.

Jordan started back toward the telephone. What if Crider had burned the canvas? But that would not have been so easy. Anyway, if he had, the burning would have left traces—ash or smell—that Eglin's men would never have missed. No, the canvas was hidden somewhere. If they could find it—

"Hello, Ron," said Gloria Hume. She stood in the doorway, smiling. She walked on in. "Nobody answers at Elsa's, but the lights were on when I came up the street. Do you know what's the matter?"

"Hi, baby!" Jordan had to get her out and make his phone call. He took her arm and turned her around. "They're home. Go knock again."

She let him lead her only a couple of steps. "Am I getting the bum's rush?"

"No, baby. I've got to talk on the telephone. Private talk."

"You're a strange one, Ron." Her full, red, over-painted lips pouted. "I wouldn't have come in, but I thought—"

She said the rest of it with her eyes. She said she thought he would like having a pretty girl walk into his apartment without knocking. She said something else with her eyes, too, that she didn't intend him to see. She said she wouldn't stand for a man not to rise to the lure she offered.

Standing there studying Gloria Hume, Jordan remembered how Eglin had ridden him, accusing him of trying to play detective. All he was in Eglin's eyes was a lady killer with merely enough brains to be a traffic cop. If he told Eglin to pick Crider up again on the basis of what he knew, he'd really ride him.

"Didn't I tell you that you were a pretty doll?" Ron put one arm around Gloria and pulled her to him The pressure of her lips were not eager. "What's this? Suddenly, you're a marble statue."

"Go on to your old telephone," she said. "I'll go and shut the door behind me."

"Baby!" He drew it out so that it expressed hurt and pleading and had an underpinning of schmaltz. And at once he started nuzzling at her fleshy, powdered throat. "Who said anything about a phone?" He had to find that paint canvas on his own. No better starting place than with chubby, cuddly Gloria. "Am I forgiven? How about a drink?"

A smile came to her lips, seeped into them. She wriggled coyly. "You hurt my feelings, you did."

"Like they say, you always hurt the one you love."

She gave him a wet peck on the cheek for that. Before leaving her for the bottle he still had in his suitcase, he gave her a squeeze. If you're playing the part of a lover boy, he told himself, you play it. He brought the drinks from the

kitchen to the couch, where she sat waiting, obviously for more than a drink . . . The smooching and the hand-roaming was interspersed with tugs at the scotch. He tried to keep her drinking steadily, gambling that she had less tolerance for the scotch than he had.

Gloria cuddled to him. "St. Looie man," she said.

"Rat killer."

"No. You're too damn sweet for that."

"Let me freshen your drink." He bent for the bottle on the floor in front of them, but her arms were around his neck. "Hey, baby, let me get to that bottle. Come on—"

She shook her head. She put her lips to his. Suction lips, Jordan thought. And he wondered how in the hell he was ever going to get any information out of her. Judging by the progress he was making, as a detective, he deserved to be in traffic.

"What's between you and this Bart across the hall?" he asked. Pulling it cold out of the hat. "That young kid's got it bad for you."

She laughed; the soprano trill let him know she was flattered.

"Elsa told me. Said he tossed in his sleep. Gloria. Gloria. All through the night—out of his sleep —he keeps calling your name."

"Men all over town do that," Gloria said, making a wide, drunken gesture with her arm.

"He's young, but he's a handy man. You know. He can make anything. But you're the one exception, baby."

Gloria giggled.

"And he paints. Houses. Anything. Wants to paint a room for his sister, but he needs this big canvas thing that you put down on the floor—"

She reacted to that. A shot of electricity wouldn't have had more of an effect. She sat poker-straight, her arms came from around Jordan's neck. Alert, no longer drunk.

"What's the matter, baby?" said Jordan.

She didn't answer, didn't move, sat glaring at him.

"Seems Bart lost this canvas," he gripped Gloria's wrist hard, thinking to hell with subtlety. "And he needs it now. Would you know where—?"

The hard jerk of her arm didn't free her wrist. "Who are you?"

If the canvas was destroyed, Jordan thought, she wouldn't be taking on so. And out of nowhere he remembered something — remembered Elsa saying that Bart had been fussing with their living room carpet, though he'd put that carpet down some time ago.

"You're a cop!" Her accusation was venomous. With an abrupt, savage threshing of her arm, she freed herself from Jordan's grip.

Jordan's hand groped to recover its hold, but Gloria had sprung back from the couch and stood facing him. Her heavy breasts rose and fell with her hard breathing.

The cleavage accentuated their flaccid heaviness. From her bosom, she drew a small automatic, as Jordan arose slowly from the couch.

All the time that canvas was under the carpet, he thought, right across the hall.

"I knew you was a cop! I knew you was a filthy cop right along!"

She moved carefully to the phone. She kept her eyes on Jordan as she dialed . . .

5.

Crider moved across to Gloria as soon as he came into the room and took the automatic from her. As the depthless stare of the man's square lenses fixed on him, Jordan told himself that Ben Eglin would be furious with him. He'd flubbed it. That was the word Captain Sline had used that day.

"Hand over the gun, Crider," Jordan said. "You're all done."

"You know me?" The blank eyes studied him. "You are a cop."

"I told you!" Gloria wailed.

"Shut up, Gloria," said Crider.

"I told you, Joe," Gloria cried again. Her mind was fixed rigidly on that one idea, clinging to it as though it absolved her from all guilt. "He said he was a rat killer. I knew he was a phony."

Jordan ached to reach for the revolver in his armpit, but his hands down at his sides seemed a million miles away. He heard a sob from Gloria.

Crider had used her to get hold of Garfield in some fashion. Jordan was sure of it—as sure as he was that Gloria, and not Elsa, was there the night Garfield had died. She was a creature who could not tolerate indifference in any man, yet used any man she got her hands on. She had seen murder once. She thought she was going to witness it again.

Yet there was something Eglin had said: Crider was too smart to kill a cop in cold blood. Eglin was right. That was why Crider had not yet pulled the trigger. Crider was trying to figure a way out.

A warning cry came out of Gloria, mingling with the voice of Elsa. She stood at the door, with Bart behind her. "Ron!" Elsa cried.

Crider fired once—an unintended shot—as he spun; reflex pulled the trigger. The bullet thudded into the wall to Jordan's left. Ron got his pistol half out before Crider twisted back. Jordan felt a burning sting at his shoulder and then the pain came. His gun was falling and he was falling. He was hit. Crider had fired a second time.

He heard Elsa call his name again, and a strangled cry from Bart. Bart flung himself blindly at Crider, half-jump, half-stumble, on the twisted foot. But it took Crider by surprise. Bart hit him, and they went down.

Elsa reached Jordan as he was

trying to push up from the floor. Ben Eglin was there, too, flinging himself at the tangle of bodies. Jordan saw the automatic skid across the floor, saw Bart push it aside. Eglin stood, pulling Crider to his feet.

Eglin hit Crider once, hard, knocking him into the arms of the big, cold-eyed cop who had followed Eglin in. The big cop held him away and measured him, then struck. Crider slammed to the floor.

Gloria sat on the floor near the door, her hands over her face. Bart rolled over and sat up. Elsa looked with tragic face from Bart to Jordan where he stood weaving. When Bart got to his feet she came to Jordan and guided him to the couch, saying softly, "Ron. Oh, Ron."

"Hey!" Eglin hollered to Jordan, "You're shot!" He turned to the big cop. "Call the ambulance."

Bart rushed to his sister. "Crider was going to kill you," he sobbed. "If I told, he was going to kill you. Even if he went to prison and couldn't do it, he was going to have somebody kill you for him. I couldn't tell!"

"Well, I'll be—" said Eglin. He walked around Elsa and Bart and began taking off Jordan's coat, very gently. The big cop was back; he cut away Jordan's shirt, compressed a wad of it against the small hole. "You can be glad that wasn't a thirty-eight or a forty-five slug."

Gloria got over on her hands and knees and crawled to the door.

"Not yet, sister," said Eglin. He went to her and pulled her to her feet and sat her in a chair.

Jordan said, "Bart, tell me how you happened to get hold of the canvas from that back room floor?"

Bart still held onto his sister. He looked defiantly at Eglin. "I had to hang onto it. If I didn't, it—it would end with my sister being killed."

"Suppose you tell us about it," said Eglin.

"I can tell you some of it," said Jordan. "Gloria was there that night, not Elsa. And when Garfield was shot, he was standing on a canvas that Bart had put down in the back room, because he was getting ready to paint the room. That right, Bart?"

Bart nodded.

"I know you're a smart cop, Jordan," growled Eglin. "But you weren't there, Bart was. I want him to tell it."

Bart Berkey was gaining confidence. He stood away from his sister but spoke to Jordan, not Eglin. "Mr. Crider and Gloria were there first. Then Garfield came in. He had a funny sort of look on his face. I don't think they expected him, the way they acted. They went in the back room and closed the door. I heard Gloria's voice. And Garfield's. He was angry. Then I heard a shot and I ran in—" Bart stopped and looked uncertainly

at the unconscious Crider.

Eglin said, "Did you see the gun?"

"Mr. Crider had it. He gave it to Gloria and told her to walk a few blocks away and call a taxi and go home."

Eglin walked over and stood in front of Gloria. "All right, Gloria," he said. "It's your turn."

She looked at Crider. "He made me!"

"He made you what?"

"He made me go out with Bob. I told him it would get us all in trouble."

"Stop sniveling. You played up to Garfield. What for?"

"To get him to leave the bookie business alone."

"Garfield was taking from Crider and spending it on you. Was that it?"

"That's the way you said it was."

Eglin cut at her coldly. "You corrupted a young cop with that body of yours. Stall again with me and I'll see that you have no chance to turn state's evidence. You'll go to trial right alongside Crider."

She shrank down in the chair. "He made me, I told you."

"Out with it now. What happened that night?"

"Bob said he was looking for us to tell us he was through. Through with Joe and—and through with me. He ordered Joe to take out all the phones. Joe accused him of trying to hike the ante and laughed at him. He knocked Joe down and started to knock him down again. That was when Joe shot him."

"That's enough," said Eglin. "We'll put the rest in writing." He turned away from her, then came back. "One more question," he said slowly. "Was Garfield trying to hike the ante?"

"No," said Gloria wearily. "He wasn't a bad guy. He was going to turn in his badge."

"All right, Bart," said Eglin. "Suppose you button it up for us. What happened after Gloria left?"

"Mr. Crider moved his car around into the alley by the side door. I—I tried to run then, but he caught me. He said he would kill Elsa if I didn't tell the story he gave me. And he ordered me to get rid of the paint canvas. Then he made me help him carry the body to the car. He was going to take it—I don't know where. We got the body out of the door and then —then I couldn't stand it any more. I dropped the feet and ran. But I came back because of Crider's threat. I'd seen the blood on the canvas; so I got it and the paint and stuff. I was too scared to try and get rid of the canvas, afraid I might not do a good job and Elsa'd be killed because of it. So I hid it—under our living room carpet."

Elsa was half tearful, half angry. "Bart, you—why didn't you tell me?"

Eglin looked at her. In any other man his expression would have

been called shame. In Eglin it was sheepishness.

Crider was beginning to stir, with the big cop standing over him. There was a bit of irony here, thought Jordan. Crider had understood Bart Berkey thoroughly, had seen that a threat to kill Elsa would terrify Bart into silence where a threat to kill Bart himself would not. But that same threat in the end had done for Crider. When Jordan was shot and Elsa ran to him, she put herself in front of Crider's gun. In that moment her brother lost all his fears and turned from a mouse into a tiger.

Eglin said, "Having Crider's wire tapped wasn't such a bad idea. We'd never have got here otherwise. Sometimes police routine is worth something."

Eglin stood before Elsa. "Jordan here is supposed to be quite a terror with the women," he said. "I sicked him on you. He was right about you and I was wrong. Not just wrong. I've never been so wrong about anybody in my life."

Elsa didn't reply right away. She gave Jordan a long, enigmatic look. When she returned her attention to Eglin she was smiling coolly. "Yes, Inspector."

She had not quite forgiven him, Jordan thought. When a man thinks a woman is a tramp, and she finds it out, he is on the hook with her for a long, long time. But Jordan wasn't sore at him any more. Jordan had looked down the barrel of a killer's gun in line of duty. He understood that special hatred that Ben Eglin had for cop killers. He had it, too, now.

Two white-coated men came in, one carrying a bag, the other a collapsed stretcher. The one with the bag clucked over Jordan, the other spread the stretcher on the floor. Jordan felt good. He felt tough. He didn't feel like a rookie. He decided he would walk out. The two men caught him as he fell.

"That's shock," explained the one with the bag. "Puts rubber in your legs."

Elsa picked up his coat. "Bart, you stay with Inspector Eglin."

She did not add that she was going with Jordan. She just walked out beside the stretcher and climbed in back of the ambulance as though it were her unquestioned place. Jordan lay back and watched the shape of her smile on him as the ambulance swayed through the streets. He had an odd feeling that his fancy-free days were over.

Announcing . . .

Alfred HITCHCOCK'S
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A brand-new monthly magazine published by the publishers of MANHUNT, best-selling crime fiction magazine . . . and personally supervised by Alfred Hitchcock . . . is on your newsstands now!

In ALFRED HITCHCOCK's MYSTERY MAGAZINE you will find the same deft crime and terror stories which have won Mr. Hitchcock international renown as The Master of Suspense.

For excitement, surprise, mystery . . . read ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE . . . on your newsstands now.

Stranger in the House

BY

THEODORE PRATT

HER REGULAR cleaning woman had not appeared that morning, and by the time Mrs. Belding decided she was not coming, and had called the employment agency to send over another to her apartment, it was nearly ten o'clock.

The woman the agency sent was a big creature. She was so tall that she stooped, giving her broad, harsh face a rather ridiculous look as it peered out from under a crazy, flopping little hat set on a mass of straggly gray hair. Her blood-shot gray eyes lighted up,

"Hattie!" Mrs. Belding called. Only silence answered her . . .

blazing, upon seeing Mrs. Belding, as if in fierce anticipation at working for so lovely a lady.

She was so formidable in appearance that Mrs. Belding was a little disturbed at the idea of having her in the apartment all day. She had heard stories of how strange servants had robbed their employers. She hesitated as she looked at the woman. But when she thought of the reputation of the employment agency and saw again the woman's funny hat, she asked the woman if she were willing, considering how late she had come, to work until six instead of five.

The woman boomed out readily, in a deep and husky voice, "Sure, Ma'm, sure am." She didn't smile, but seemed deathly serious, as if sincerity might be a passion with her. Her name, she said, was Hattie.

Mrs. Belding regretted her decision a little when Hattie had prepared herself for work by simply setting her hat on a chair in the hall. Without her crazy hat perched on her frizzly head, the woman no longer seemed amusing. She was now almost threatening. But when Mrs. Belding explained what was to be done, and Hattie had started, attacking the tasks with a surprising willingness and speed, Mrs. Belding decided that her fears were groundless.

At the same time, it occurred to her, for the first time, that she would have to stay in the apartment all day. It wouldn't do to leave it in charge of an unknown cleaning woman. Mrs. Belding had meant to shop for some new stockings to go with the evening dress she would wear that night when she dined out with friends. She considered doing her shopping anyway, wondering if she could trust Hattie.

She thought of calling up the employment agency and asking about Hattie. But agencies couldn't know everything about the people they sent, and besides she couldn't very well make the inquiry with Hattie listening. She saw Hattie moving the piano to clean in back of it, thrusting the heavy instrument aside as if it were little more than a heavy chair. She decided that the old stockings, mended, would have to do.

Mrs. Belding watched Hattie closely, but the only thing she saw was the woman's strength. She had difficulty composing herself, or finding a comfortable place to sit, as Hattie bustled about, doing work in a few minutes that ordinarily took the better part of an hour to accomplish. It rather alarmed Mrs. Belding. It made her feel nervous. But she reflected that ability, speed, willingness, and strength were no qualities to complain about in a cleaning woman. She had been accustomed to laziness and sometimes downright shirking — such as the regular woman not coming at all today and sending no message.

She felt angry with the regular

woman, and friendly toward Hattie, resolving to keep Hattie permanently if she turned out to be all right in other respects. She examined the work that had already been done, and was pleased.

If Mrs. Belding watched Hattie, and contrived to stay much in the same room with her, Hattie followed the same tactics herself. She didn't seem to mind being supervised at all, but appeared to like having Mrs. Belding with her, and several times followed her about. She kept looking at Mrs. Belding, as if in deep admiration, but this did not interfere with her work. She went steadily about it all that morning, almost grimly, and silently — except when an especially energetic outburst made her pant a little.

At noon, when Mrs. Belding began preparing lunch, Hattie suggested, "You let me fix it, Mrs. Belding." And when she was told she could do so if she wished, she said with serious gratitude, "Yes, Ma'm."

Hattie's meal was dainty and delicious. She served it to Mrs. Belding as if she had been long a retainer in the household. She was highly solicitous, several times interrupting her own lunch, which she was having in the kitchen, to come in and inquire if everything were satisfactory. She hovered about anxiously wanting to please. Mrs. Belding had never before experienced such attention and devotion in the short course of a meal.

Hattie was almost loving in her service. Mrs. Belding complimented her and the woman replied, from a voice choked with emotion, "Sure, Ma'm."

By this time Mrs. Belding was assured that Hattie did not mean to rob her. If the woman meant to, she would certainly have attempted it before this, instead of working so hard and efficiently all the time. She looked at Hattie's face and found it drawn. Trying to make a good impression and overdoing the effort, thought Mrs. Belding. Poor thing.

Mrs. Belding did not object when, in the afternoon, Hattie slowed down considerably and became talkative. The woman had started on the closets. And when she came to the one in Mrs. Belding's bedroom, she spent some time in it. She busied herself at examining the clothes there, sometimes touching them, as with envious hands.

"You got fine clothes, Mrs. Belding," she announced.

Her voice went through the room, through the whole apartment, resounding against the walls. "All women's clothes, too. No man's clothes here. You don't have a man, Mrs. Belding?"

Mrs. Belding smiled at this inquisitiveness that had been so long in coming out, and replied, "No, Hattie."

A little later, Hattie observed the things that had been laid out on

the bed and said, "You got your evening dress ready. I'll bet you got a man coming to call for you tonight, ain't you, Mrs. Belding?" And Hattie touched the dress softly.

"No, I . . . "

Something in the way Hattie asked this made Mrs. Belding check herself. This was no business of Hattie's. Even if Hattie seemed all right, possibly it was not a good plan to admit that there was no man about the place. She tried to cover up her admission. "Yes," she said, "there is a gentleman calling for me later."

Hattie laughed. It was a long, throaty laugh, full and unrestrained. Caressing the clothes with big, affectionate hands, and stooping over them, she said, "I like to imagine how you'll look in that dress, Mrs. Belding. I sure like to work for a beautiful woman like you, Mrs. Belding."

Hattie's laugh remained in the room, echoing, for minutes after she left it.

Mrs. Belding had been disturbed by the whole thing. But she, finally, decided that Hattie's comments on the clothes had simply been in the nature of a hint that she be given some old clothes, either those of a woman, or of a man. Cleaning women were always wanting clothes, and asking for them by admiring those of the people for whom they worked. That was the way they obtained much of their clothing.

Mrs. Belding laughed herself when she pictured Hattie in any of her cast-off things; they wouldn't cover half the woman. But then, maybe she wanted them for a sister —or a friend.

Late in the afternoon, Mrs. Belding was sitting on the stool before her dressing-table mending a run in the top of one of the stockings she was to wear that evening. She had not heard Hattie at her work for some time. She listened, and when a number of minutes went by and there was still no noise, she rose and went out to see what Hattie was doing.

Hattie was not in the living room. She was not in the hall nor in the kitchen. Mystified, Mrs. Belding glanced at the closed bathroom door. The woman must be there. She called her name.

From behind the door, muffled, but still booming, came Hattie's voice. "Yes, Ma'm, you want me, Mrs. Belding?"

"I didn't know where you were," Mrs. Belding said, speaking in the direction of the bathroom.

"I'll be ready in a minute, Mrs. Belding," Hattie said from behind the door.

Mrs. Belding went back to her bedroom. Something about Hattie's reply bothered her, but she didn't know what it was. She thought Hattie had finished in the bathroom, but evidently she hadn't.

Mrs. Belding took up the mending of her stocking again. She lis-

tened for Hattie, but heard nothing. When a longer time than before went by without any noise being made, she called out as she had before, but this time from where she sat.

There was no answer. She called again. Still there was no reply. She wondered what Hattie could be doing. Whatever it was, she was taking a long time about it. Mrs. Belding wanted her to get through, for she meant to take a bath in a few minutes. Surely the woman must have heard her. She put down her mending, got up, and went out into the hall.

"Hattie!" she called. There was no reply. "Hattie!" Her call was nearly a cry this time. But no answer came from the bathroom. Nor was there any sound of movement.

What had happened to the woman? She must still be in the bathroom. Or had she sneaked out, perhaps to let someone else in the apartment?

Mrs. Belding turned quickly about, looking. There was no one to be seen. There was no sound in the apartment.

She took a step toward the bathroom door, then stopped, cautiously. It was indeed strange.

"Hattie!" she called again.

Only silence answered her.

Mrs. Belding stood there, her heart beating fast. The thought came to her that Hattie had left without saying anything, without collecting her wages. While trying to figure out why the woman would do such a thing, she looked for Hattie's hat.

The crazy little thing was still on the chair. Hattie was still in the apartment.

Mrs. Belding wanted to call in a neighbor, or the building superintendent, or a policeman, to help her investigate. But she hesitated at the prospect of raising a hue and cry over what might be nothing.

In her irresolution at deciding what to do, another thought, a more logical solution, came to her. She remembered the drawn look on Hattie's face, and how Hattie had slowed down at the work, as though tired. The woman had probably gone beyond the capacity of her strength and fainted in the bathroom. That was it, of course. That was why she hadn't answered.

Concerned, and a little irritated, Mrs. Belding went to the door and opened it. Hattie was not to be seen. Mrs. Belding stepped into the bathroom.

As soon as she was well into the room, the door swung closed behind her, snapping shut with a sharp click. There was a movement there, and she whirled around quickly to see what it was.

An utterly naked man, who looked gigantic, stood against the door.

In the confusion and shock of her first horror, Mrs. Belding looked about for Hattie. All that

was to be seen of her were a heap of clothing and a wig of straggly gray hair lying on the floor. Other than that, there was only the man standing there starkly nude, exposed and horribly ready, staring down at her from his blood-shot eyes which were now wide and burning.

Mrs. Belding's lips parted to emit a scream that her terror had so far denied her, but before she could get it out a firm, large hot hand was placed over her mouth, twisting her about so that the back of her head was pressed against a hard sweaty chest that was breathing fast, and another hand began to tear viciously at the clothing on her shoulder.

Power Of Influence

Woodrow Woodson, of Corning, Calif., was ticketed for a traffic violation. He felt the charge was unfair and decided to do something about it. He ordered police to clear out of their headquarters within 30 days. He owns the building.

Oversight

City officials at Lucedale, Miss., fired Ed Walley, night policeman, but they forgot to have him turn in his parking meter key. Six weeks later Walley was arrested for using his key to loot meters.

Sugar Sweet

The burglars who raided a warehouse in Johannesburg, S. A., must have been sweet-toothed. They stole 200,000 pieces of chewing gum, 33,000 boxes of cough drops and 60 bags of sugar.

Easy Out

Lt. Col. Jose Vasquez, in charge of the city jail at Tijuana, Mexico, was especially disappointed when nine prisoners escaped. He said the fugitives quietly walked away during a party given in his honor by the prisoners.

Tea For Two

Peter Clements, London, Eng., filed suit for divorce after he came home unexpectedly one day and found his wife drinking tea with a man. Both were nude. But his divorce was denied. The wife testified that she and the man, Peter Scott-Darling, both were nudists. She added that they were just having a social afternoon and had not, as alleged by her non-nudist husband, been misbehaving.

...Into the Parlor

BY
PAUL EIDEN

Just phoning these beautiful girls gave him a charge. Then, to Diener's everlasting regret, he actually met *one . . .*

DIENER GOT the picture of a girl in white panties and bra out of his jacket pocket and then fumbled a cigarette into his mouth. The girl's body was long-legged and beautiful and arched in a provocative pose. Thick dark hair framed a heartbreaking twenty-year-old face. The picture had been ripped from a glossy-paper magazine. On the margin Diener had written "Linda Land" and a phone number. He dialed the number.

The phone whirred in his ear and Diener sourly studied his reflection in the glass door of the drug store phone booth. He hated his small nervous face and the thinned-out mouse-colored hair that let the freckles on his scalp show through. For the millionth time, Diener wished he was four inches taller, thirty-pounds heavier. He wished he had a really decent suit, and thick curly black hair like Farley Grainger or Tony Curtis.

"Hello? Hello?" the warm contralto voice came through the phone.

"Hello, Linda!" Diener burst out. Then his voice grew thick and cottony. "Know who this is?"

"Who?" The voice had become sharp with annoyance. "Listen, what number do you want?"

Diener forced a chuckle. "Listen, Linda. This is Farley Curtis. Remember?"

A tiny sound that might have been a gasp answered him. The line went dead for a long moment.

"Oh! Hi, Farley!" The girl's voice had come back sounding strained, unsure of itself. "I thought I was never going to hear from you. It's been such a long time, I thought you forgot all about me."

"As if I ever could," Diener laughed suavely into the phone. "It's – I was out of town. On a little business trip." Something was soaring inside him like a rocket. "Texas!" he improvised wildly. "A little business trip to Texas!"

"Oh. But you could have called me long distance." Was there a pout in her voice, Diener wondered, panicky. But before he could answer, she grew suddenly eager. "Why don't you come up now? I'm going to be all alone. I've been laying here in bed just wishing something exciting would happen to me tonight . . ."

"B-but," Diener spluttered, thinking of his old raincoat, his cheap, wrinkled suit. "I couldn't. I'm not dressed. Just some old clothes I wear when I have to go out to my oil fields." His legs began to tremble violently.

"I don't care, Farley!" The voice lilted in his ear. "I – I'd like to see you that way. I'll tell you what – I'll dress exactly the way you told me I was in the first picture you saw of me."

Diener's mind reeled, remembering a wispy, lace-topped negligee dipping down to bare young breasts, open over a strong, naked leg. The phone was slippery in the sweat of his palm. He fought his timidity, but lost to it again. "I can't, Linda. I – "

"Farley Curtis, if you don't come up right now, I'll hang up on you every time you call. I swear I will!" The anger went out of her voice then. "Please!" she pleaded. "I've never even met an adventurous man like you!"

The words were like straight whiskey to Diener. "Okay. Where's your place?"

She gave him an address in the east Eighties. Diener hung up. He dropped the cigarette and crushed it thoroughly under his shoe. *It's all in the way you talk to them. You've got to be bold. Women love bold men.* Diener hooked up the corner of his mouth in a smile, the way Errol Flynn does, and went out to find a cab.

The apartment building lobby was all glass brick and marble. A uniformed doorman pushed one of a row of buttons and said into the phone that hung beside them, "Mr. Curtis, ma'am." His eyes were faintly envious as he nodded toward the self-service elevator. "14-A, sir."

The elevator door slid open with a pneumatic *whoosh* and Diener stepped into a tiny foyer with three doors opening off it. He rapped too sharply on the one marked 14-A, feeling himself taut with lust. There was a muted click behind him and the elevator door rattled faintly as the cage began its descent.

The door of 14-A was drawn quickly open and Diener beheld Linda. Her face was abnormally white against the mass of dark hair. The scarlet lips were parted and her jaw made nervous chewing motions. With a flicker of disappointment, Diener took in the quilted gray housecoat buttoned to her chin. She was taller than he had thought, too.

Something scraped lightly on the floor behind him and a sledge hammer drove into his kidney. Diener shot, stumbling, past the side-stepping girl into the dark apartment. A small gossip bench crashed away from his clawing hands. Diener fell to his knees, his cheekbone thudding into the edge of a doorframe. He felt two huge hands grip him, swing him to his feet.

Linda was at the door, closing it against his flight. The man who held him was over six feet tall, redhaired, huge in a costly blue suit. He held Diener's shirt in a choking ball at his throat and his cocked fist shot forward. In the split second before the fist exploded against his face, Diener thought giddily: "What a handsome guy!"

The room tilted. Diener was on his knees again, watching his blood drip onto a polished parquet floor inches from his nose. Two sharp kicks drove a scream through his puffed lips. He was hauled to his feet again.

The big man didn't curse. Silently, methodically, he threw his maul-like fists into Diener's ribs, at his heart. Diener clutched feebly at his sleeves, feeling himself on the edge of oblivion. "No, no, Tim!" Linda was calling from a mountain-top. "That's not him! That's not the one!"

The big man stepped suddenly away from Diener. Diener leaned slackly against the wall. "You're sure?" The big man asked. "This isn't the one you saw? He's not the

one that threatened you?"

"No! Don't hit him again, Please!"

The big man eyed Diener thoughtfully for a moment. Then he bent and righted the tiny bench. He thrust Diener contemptuously into the seat. Unhurriedly, he drew a badge in a leather holder from his hip pocket and held it inches from Diener's face. "Lieutenant Patterson, vice squad. Get your I-D out." His breathing was only slightly disturbed from the exertion of having beaten Diener helpless.

Diener shook his head dazedly. With surprising gentleness, the big man went through Diener's pockets until he found a wallet. He turned to the girl. "Better get him a drink," he muttered, and Diener heard Linda's mules clatter out of the entrance hallway.

"Elroy Diener," Patterson read out of the wallet. "I thought you said your name was Curtis?"

"I thought – thought it sounded better," Diener choked out, grateful for the man's calmness.

"What did you think you were trying to do?"

Diener said: "I–," and then shook his head hopelessly.

"You ever been arrested before, Elroy?"

"No! No!" Diener for the first time raised his eyes. He repeated himself, for it seemed important to show this man he was innocent of any past guilt.

Linda was back then, holding two glasses, one of water, the other a third full of whiskey. She handed them to Diener. He could smell her perfume. He thought her eyes seemed warm and forgiving.

"I got to take you in anyway," Patterson said.

In the lobby, Patterson walked on his left, shielding him with his bulk from the eyes of the doorman. The big policeman seemed bored now and disposed to be kindly. Outside, he tugged Diener gently toward a black and yellow '56 Buick convertible. He held the door open for Diener and didn't handcuff him.

After a silent, two-mile drive downtown, Patterson parked before the twin green lights of a police station near Third Avenue. A big Italian sergeant behind the desk flashed a smile and called, "'Lo, Tim!" Patterson replied with a wave and led Diener up a rickety, sour-smelling staircase into a long room on the second floor.

The room contained battered desks and filing cases, grim under the harsh overhead lights, and a long row of yellow oak chairs. Two men sat at one of the desks, drinking coffee from cardboard containers. They looked quizzically at Patterson when they saw Diener's bruised, white face. "Got a cutie," Patterson told them, and they went disinterestedly back to their coffee.

Diener was brought to a high fingerprint table against the wall.

He stood passive and unspeaking while Patterson fastened a fresh card in the holder, squeezed ink onto a glass plate and spread it with a roller. "Now just relax and let me do it," the big man said, pressing Diener's fingers into the ink and rolling them one at a time onto the card. His voice was soft. Diener, remembering the fists thudding into his ribs, felt relief shake his knees.

Patterson led him to one of the chairs, removing a pair of handcuffs from his belt. He fastened one link to the chair and pushed Diener's sleeve back. The metal clicked, cold and irrevocable, around the bared wrist. A deep sigh of resignation wheezed through Diener's nostrils.

Patterson, carrying the fingerprint card, paused to speak briefly with the two detectives and went out of the room. Diener hadn't heard what had been said. He closed his eyes. The whiskey the girl had given him burned sourly at the back of his throat. His body and his head ached.

Don't get sick. He's not mad anymore. Maybe he'll let me go. He seems like a nice guy. Don't get sick. He might get sore again if I puke here. Maybe he'll let me go. He repeated it over and over to himself, like a kid praying. *Maybe he'll let me go.*

He relived lying in bed when he was little, hearing his old man come in, mean drunk as usual, looking for somebody to beat up. He used to lie there, saying over and over to himself, "If I'm quiet, he won't come in here." Sometimes it had worked.

A half hour passed. The two men at the desks argued desultorily about Leo Durocher. *Maybe he'll let me go,* Diener thought.

Then Patterson was back, standing over him. The handcuffs came off. "Comeon, Elroy," Patterson said. Diener rose and followed the broad, beautifully tailored back down the stairs and into the street.

Patterson paused by his car, a big man with thick healthy hair, coatless against the chill night. "There's a bar around the corner on Third," he told Diener. "You want a beer?"

Diener nodded dumbly.

In the half-empty bar, Patterson slid into a booth and held up two fingers to the waiter. "A pair of brews."

The little Puerto Rican grinned and said, "Si, Teem."

Patterson watched thoughtfully while Diener poured the beer into his burning throat. "It's a good thing for you, you didn't lie to me," he said at last. "I called headquarters after I got a classification on your prints. You don't have any record. What did you think you were doing up there tonight?"

Diener flushed and lowered his eyes to the table top. "I—I don't know. It's crazy, all that stuff I

told her. I just wanted to meet her, I guess." A wild hope was running through Diener. *Maybe he'll let me go, if I can just make him see what it's like.* "I can never talk to girls when I meet them. An ugly guy like me. I'm too shy." He moved his head abruptly to look Patterson in the eye. "I'm thirty-four. I never had a girl in my life without paying her for it!"

Patterson was nodding his head attentively. He grinned. "No romance without the finance, eh? Well, we all pay them for it, one way or another."

Patterson had even white teeth, deep dimples. Diener thought, *he could be a movie star, or on TV. A big shot. I wonder why he stays just a cop? He's the kind of guy everybody likes, right off, man or woman . . .*

Aloud, Diener said: "But with me it's always been just streetwalkers. 'Five dollars, please.' Wham! Bam! 'Thank you, ma'am!' I guess that's why I call up all those models out of the magazines when I can find their names in the phone book. They don't know what I look like, and I feel, you know, bolder . . . "

Patterson's eyes were thoughtful. The big man sipped his beer and asked, "Where do you work?"

Diener told him the name of the restaurant chain that employed him and the location of the store he worked in.

"What d'yuh do?" Patterson asked, and after Diener told him that he was a short order cook, "What shift you got?"

"Midnight to eight," Diener said.

Patterson sipped his beer silently for a minute. Abruptly, he said: "Linda Land's my first cousin. She's been getting phone calls from some creep who says he wants to marry her. Sometimes he even hangs around the entrance of her apartment building. He's threatened to throw acid in her face if she doesn't see him. She had a police guard for awhile, but nothing happened and it was taken off."

"I never did — said — anything like that," Diener choked, panic charging at him again.

"That's why I was there tonight. Hoping that guy would call up and I could set up a trap for him. But you showed up instead." Patterson drummed his fingers irritably on the table, his eyes growing hard. "You know I could get you a sixer on Riker's Island for tonight's work, don't you? How would you like shoveling stiffs into pauper's field for six months?"

"Lieutenant — uh, lieutenant," Diener began, but whatever he was going to say clogged and died in his throat.

"That's what you're going to get, and I'll see to it personally. Unless you help me out." His hard eyes caught Diener's and held them. "This creep, whoever he is, wouldn't have the guts to try anything with Linda unless she was

alone. But, by God, I can't be with her every minute of the day. That's where you could help.

"I'll give you a chance, Elroy. You seem like a pretty good guy. I like you. Whenever anything comes up where she *has* to leave the house, and I can't be with her – you could keep her company." Patterson leaned his big body across the table until his face was inches from Diener's. "Now is that such a hell of a lot to ask, when I'm saving you from doing a six month's bit?"

Relief seeped through Diener. He thought of the warmth in Linda's eyes and a tingling excitement began to grow in him. "Hell, you can count on me for that. It'll be a pleasure."

Patterson smiled. "Just stay home where she can get you on the phone." Suddenly, he held out his big hand to Diener. "Let's shake on it."

The call came the next night at five-thirty. The landlady called through the door: "Phone for you!" Diener dashed to the wall-box.

"Elroy?" It was Linda's voice. She was breathless. "Thank God!"

"Where are you? What's the matter?" The sound of his name on her lips had been like the clash of cymbals to Diener.

"I'm at the *Rouge et Noir*. It's a restaurant." She gave him an address in the East Sixties. Her voice grew hushed with fear. "Elroy, he's outside, waiting for me. I saw him. I've been trying to phone my cousin Tim, but he's on duty somewhere."

"I – I'll be there in twenty minutes."

"Thank God you're coming!" Her voice was on the thin edge of hysteria.

Diener delayed long enough to don his last clean shirt and his freshly pressed suit. There was a singing elation in him as he dashed out of the room with the worn raincoat under his arm.

Diener flung two dollar bills at the cab driver and stepped out into the rain that had been falling steadily since noon. The *Rouge et Noir* was the second door from the corner. A short flight of stairs between two potted evergreen plants led down to a canopied entrance. It was in the dim shadow of the awning that he found Linda. Her face was pale beneath the hood of her rain cape.

"I think he's up there on the sidewalk waiting for me to come out." Her arms trembled beneath his hands. "Move over there and watch for him. A gray-haired man about fifty. In a blue trench coat."

Diener went to the opposite end of the canopy. Shrugging into his raincoat, he was aware of leaded windows to his right, with smartly dressed women and successful-looking men talking across the candle-lit tables behind them.

Diener felt uneasy. Patterson had

said "that creep" would never try anything against Linda unless she were alone. But how could he be sure? Diener's flesh crawled at the thought of acid splashing into *his* face. Above them, pedestrians were streaming by. Cabs crept along in the slow crosstown traffic. "Let's get out of here," Diener called to the girl hoarsely.

The girl held her wrist watch close to her face as she bent toward the light from the restaurant windows. "No! Wait a few minutes!"

A cab angled to the curb. Diener saw the passenger leaning forward to pay the driver. Diener moved closer to Linda. "Let's take that cab and get out of here," he pleaded. Then he saw the man as he stepped out of the cab. A man carrying a light suitcase. A man about fifty, with gray hair showing under his homburg. A man in a blue trench coat.

Diener felt the girl behind him, her arms going around his waist. "Him! Him! It's him!" she breathed against his ear. The cab began to slide off. The man in the trench coat bent to pick up his bag, and saw them. A smile touched his face. "Linda!" he called.

Something between Diener's arm and side spat flame and noise twice. Utter disbelief showed on the gray-haired man's face. Then the man spun slowly on his right heel and crumpled backwards into the gutter. A tall cop in a rain-wet slicker that shone like a gun-barrel charged savagely around the cab. The girl behind Diener pressed something hot and metallic into Diener's hand.

The oncoming cop slipped at the wet curb and went to his knees. He roared a curse and flame blossomed from his hand. Diener heard glass tinkling behind his shoulder. The uniformed cop's face was that of Lieutenant Timothy Patterson. Naked murder blazed in his eyes. Diener whirled away from Linda, into the restaurant.

He saw a blur of startled faces, men half-raised from their chairs, women with hands at their rounded mouths. Then he was tearing between the tables, away from the man behind him. A hand snagged his coat and he slashed at the face above it with the hot weight in his hand.

Behind him, above the screams and babble, he could hear Patterson's roar: "Get down, damn it! Get out of the way!"

Diener was at the end of the room. Swinging doors to his right. The kitchen — no escape there. At his left, the entrance to a dim, oak-paneled bar. More startled faces gaping at him, but beyond them Diener saw a door and the blessed crowds of Madison Avenue. Head down, he plunged for the bar and the outside.

The cool rain struck his face. He heard a woman scream. Then he was dashing heedlessly into the traffic. Horns blared wildly and tires screeched, but he was across

the avenue and around the corner. Diener thrust the gun into a pocket and sprinted down the long block to Fifth Avenue and the dark immensity of Central Park.

Later, heart pounding and stomach twisted into a sour knot, Diener sat in the sheltering gloom of the newsreel theatre in Grand Central Station and wondered how he had ever managed to get there. He had flung himself down the subway stairs at Columbus Circle, not able to believe he was escaping, that Patterson was lost somewhere behind him. Then the Times Square Station and the shuttle to Grand Central, because it was the safest place he could think of.

Diener slumped in his seat and shut his eyes against the sickness and fear welling up from his viscera. He couldn't think. He didn't want to think. He didn't want ever to think again. He wanted to die.

The theatre closed at midnight. Diener slunk out to the newsstand in the waiting room. His hand was sweaty on the gun as he read the *Mirror's* headline:

GUNMAN SLAYS
AIRLINES EXEC,
ELUDES POLICE

Diener bought a copy and locked himself in a pay toilet in the men's room.

"In a seemingly senseless attack, a mysterious gunman early yesterday evening shot and killed William F. Land, 56, president of the Land-Baumont Air Freight Service, Inc., 350 Fifth Avenue, at the entrance to the Rouge et Noir, *chic eastside restaurant, before the horrified eyes of his beautiful wife, Linda, a twenty-year-old ex-model.*

"Land's murderer, a thin, shabbily-dressed middle-aged man made his escape by dashing through the restaurant to its Madison Avenue entrance, where he lost himself in the crowds of Thursday night shoppers. He had been closely pursued by Traffic Officer Timothy Patterson, 29, who arrived seconds after the shooting, but frightened patrons of the restaurant blocked the policeman long enough for the slayer to elude him. Patterson, who was able to fire only one shot at the fugitive, does not believe he wounded him.

"The shocked Linda was unable to supply any motive for her husband's slaying. Police theorized the gunman is a psychotic.

"Patrolman Patterson figured in the news two months ago, when he, along with more than forty other members of the Brooklyn plainclothes squad, suspected of involvement in the operations of king-pin bookmaker Harry Silver, was transferred back to uniform duty."

The rest of the story was mainly biographical details of the dead man. Diener read automatically through it, understanding not a word.

Diener sat on the toilet seat an hour, aching for death. He understood it all, now. The trap Patterson had laid for him in the apartment the night before, the phony trip to the police station to instill the fear of prosecution in him. He realized now how Patterson had used him—Patterson and Linda. He wondered how long they'd been planning to kill Land, and how long they'd had to wait for a sucker like him to come along.

The big cop had maneuvered him into a hopeless spot. There were a hundred diners in the restaurant who would swear he killed Land. There was no money for him to run anywhere. He could not even go back to his room. Patterson would long since have made an anonymous phone call that would send the homicide men racing there to wait for him. And he couldn't go to work. Patterson wanted him dead. And wanted it fast.

There were pictures in the *Mirror* fallen to the floor between his feet. White-coated men rolling Land on a stretcher. Linda, beautiful and tragic, being led away. Patterson, in his shiny slicker, talking to a deputy commissioner, the movie star face grim.

Diener thought of all he had read of Harry Silver's hired cops and their lush pickings. That explained why Patterson, so handsome, so likeable, fore-ordained to success and beautiful women, had been only a policeman. And after that bonanza ended, he had stayed a cop — just long enough to find someone to frame for Land's death. Because he wanted Land's money and Land's woman.

A strong, confused anger began to grow in Diener. Part of it was Patterson — Patterson, who was everything Diener was not, and still had to be a cheat. And another part of it was never having a woman he hadn't bought first. Patterson said: *"We all pay them for it, one way or another."* Well, he had payed Linda . . .

Diener left the toilet cubicle and went up the stairs to the rain of Lexington Avenue. He began the long walk up to the Eighties. It was worth it.

It was two-thirty when he stood across from Linda's building, the angry picture of what he had coming to him still clear in his mind. But the doubts were beginning to gnaw at him. How could he get past the doorman? Could he make Linda open the apartment door? Maybe Patterson would be there—with a gun.

A low black Thunderbird turned into the silent street and stopped at the building's canopy. Diener watched a bulky uniformed figure

crawl out from beneath the wheel, and cursed his own hesitation. It was the doorman. A moment earlier, he could have walked through the empty lobby to the elevator, unchallenged.

The doorman crossed the sidewalk to the lobby entrance. Seconds later, a slender girl in a rain cape emerged from the building, her walk unsteady. Diener's heart hammered as he recognized her. Linda! He crossed quickly over the glistening macadam, tore open the sports car's right hand door and slid inside, just as she released the handbrake.

Linda's scarlet mouth came open and she made a little choking sound. The dark pupils of her eyes grew glaringly large, and the drunkeness ebbed swiftly out of them.

Diener laughed. "Go ahead," he told her. The eveness of his voice surprised him. "You're going to meet him, aren't you?"

Her jaw made its characteristic nervous chewing motions and she stared at Diener mutely. The terror was rising in her visibly. Diener struck her roughly on the shoulder with the heel of his hand. "Go ahead," he ordered. The Thunderbird moved away from the curb, began to roll slowly down the deserted street.

A light caught her at the first corner. The hands on the wheel were white-knuckled with tension and she moved her head stiffly to watch him out of the corners of her eyes. Her soft fluid body had grown rigid with fear. "Don't hurt *me,*" she was praying. "It wasn't *my* idea. I only told him about you calling me up all the time. He was the one who thought up the scheme."

Diener scarcely heard her, wondering where he could take her. Not one of those grimy little hotels off Times Square. There was that motel he had seen on the way up to White Plains. Could he find it? Would they have an empty now?

A sudden thought pricked him. "Where are you going now? Are you going to meet him?" he asked her.

The girl nodded earnestly. "Uh-huh. Yes. At my old apartment." The words came tumbling frantically out of her. "I always kept it, so we would have a place to meet when my husband was in town." Linda licked her lips. "It's *him* you want, Elroy. Not *me*. He's coming there. I talked to him on the phone. They're taking him up to the Bronx to look at a stick-up suspect. Of course he knows it isn't you, but he had to go along . . ."

"Where is this place of yours?"

"Oh. Down in the Village. Nothing real nice, but discreet. A separate entrance on one of those little side streets."

Diener leaned back with a lordly grin. "Take me there."

The rain had ceased to fall when

Linda turned the Thunderbird into Gay Street, a crooked little lane off Waverly Place. She braked the car at the curb and sat motionless, staring straight out over the wheel. Watching her, Diener saw a thick tear run down the curve of her cheek. Her breath had filled the car with the heavy smell of whiskey.

"Are you going to kill me, Elroy?" she asked.

"No."

"Oh, thank God," the girl said. "Thank God."

Diener twisted in the seat to look up and down the tiny block. Patterson's black and yellow Buick was nowhere in sight. In her fright, she was probably telling him the truth.

Linda said: "He won't be here for hours yet — honey."

Diener grinned tightly and slid out of the car behind her.

Linda turned a key in a heavy green door, in the wall of a brick building built flush to the narrow sidewalk. Diener put his foot against the door, moved through it with his body touching hers.

Diener shut the door, twisted the snap lock as the girl found a wall switch. They were in a good-sized one-room basement apartment. Diener stood on the narrow landing with its cast-iron railing, watched the girl go shakily down the three steps into the room.

She turned nervously to face him. But Diener continued to study the room silently, enjoying the girl's fear. A kitchenette, a bathroom door were at his left. Over-stuffed chairs and big drum-shaded lamps crowded the carpeted portion of the room.

Linda moved to a green fold-away bed against the wall, pulled it open. She tore the raincoat off her, turned to face him. She wore blue brocade pajamas. The jacket hung straight down from the twin points of her breasts, inches away from her belly, like a curtain.

"You — you aren't going to kill me, Elroy?"

Diener's laugh was half sneer. He came down the three stairs, watching the panic race behind Linda's eyes. She said: "I—, You —," and then, "Honey," and threw her slender body into his arms. Diener felt her hands under his coat, her nails sharp in his back as she hugged herself to him, her body tight against his.

Her mouth was warm and wet against his throat. "Don't hurt *me*," she was praying. "It wasn't *my* idea." She moved her lips to his ear. Linda was fighting the only way she knew how.

"I told him he shouldn't do it to you." Her breath was a flame in his ear. "I told him you were just a shy, helpless guy. I told him you were just backward with girls. You just need one that understands you."

Her thighs moved strongly, insistently, against Diener's. He took his hands from the raincoat pockets

and put them hungrily on her arched back, feeling the stiff cloth slide on her flesh. He still held the gun. It was a snub-nosed .38. It was the first time Diener had really seen it.

Linda's hands were exerting a different pressure on his back now. They were pulling, moving him toward the bed. Diener allowed her to move him. *"You've been payed, tramp,"* he thought.

"I'll understand you, Elroy. Always. I'll help you. We can run away. I've got money. I want a man like you to make love to me. Make love to me, Elroy."

They half-fell onto the bed. Diener held the gun loosely, the muzzle at the girl's temple. She knew it was there. Her mouth was open, mobile and frantic under his . . .

She raised cool fingertips to his temples. Gently she squeegeed the perspiration from the short hairs there and laughed up at him. Diener kissed her — without passion now, almost absently — and raised himself from her body.

Patterson came at four-thirty. Diener got up from his chair and stood behind the door when he heard the car, knowing it was his and no other's. He listened to the slam of the Buick's door and Patterson's quick, light heels crossing the walk; he could imagine the big policeman feeling pleasantly tired now, but satisfied with the night's work, exulting over the widow who was his now.

Linda lay on the rumpled bed, her naked back to the door, as if asleep. No blood showed where the two bullets had entered the thick brunette hair, just above her left ear.

Patterson's key ground in the lock, and Diener thought: come into the parlor, said the spi — —.

He came in with his trench coat open, a brown pork pie hat in his hand, chuckling drily at the blazing lamps and the naked girl waiting for him. In the next second, bending over the bed, seeing the girl was dead, he sensed Diener behind him.

Patterson whirled. His jaw dropped. Then he smiled at Diener. *How quickly he smiles,* Diener thought.

"Leave your gun alone!" Diener shrieked. Aiming carefully, he put the last two bullets into Patterson's big thigh.

The red-headed man clutched his leg just above the knee. Blood spurted between his fingers. He groaned. As Patterson fell to the floor, Diener wiped the gun clean and threw it at him. Then he watched Patterson slowly twist himself upright against Linda's bed, lifting his wounded leg like a log. His courage ran out of him with his blood. His eyes looked like Linda's had looked, pleading, frantic.

"How'd you get here?" Patterson groaned. Outside, Diener could

hear a window slide up, a woman's voice calling, distant, frightened. He pulled the door open, looked out. The short block to Waverly was empty.

He cast a glance over his shoulder. Patterson, rocking back and forth on the floor with set teeth and sick eyes, could never leave without help. And Patterson could never explain the dead girl there beside him, the empty gun, nor Land's death.

Diener sucked in a deep breath of the night air, flung himself through the door of the apartment. Within two minutes, he was rocketing away on a Sixth Avenue express. He felt no elation, only the remembered terror of the rabbit who has somehow managed to squeeze out of the trap.

Enforcing Temperance

In Tulsa, Okla., William Wolverine, excise officer, successfully found an illegal still despite the fact that "onions by the peck" were being burned on a hot plate as a cover-up for the fumes. "They can use onions, polecats, disinfectants or anything else, but we can still detect the smell of a still," he told reporters.

Out Of Jail

Police commissioners in Trenton, N. J., sentenced Herbert V. Selby, a state prison counselor, to a five-day suspension without pay on complaint of a prisoner. The prisoner said Selby had tactlessly persisted in wearing a political badge reading: "You never had it so good."

Not Dead Yet

Washington, D. C. authorities recently were working on a curious case in which the loot was buried, but not by the thieves. Moreover, they prefer that the loot remains buried.

The loot consisted of about 80 coffins which police say were stolen by employees of a casket manufacturing company and sold to funeral directors over a period of several years. Four men were arrested.

Horse Sense

In Ann Arbor, Mich., a bewildered farmer called police and reported that he had observed a damaged truck speeding down a highway with a horse in hot pursuit. Officers in a squad car near the scene succeeded in stopping the truck. They arrested the driver for leaving the scene of an accident. Police explained that the horse was bounced out of the truck when the truck sideswiped a passing car. The horse was only trying to catch up with the truck.

RELAX, LIEUTENANT; you'll get your statement. Yeah, I know—the doc passed you the word. But I'll make it.

Like I said, the first time I saw Heddon was one night a couple of months ago. I didn't know who he was, then. He came out of the Drexler Building — that's my stand — about eight-thirty, climbed into my hack.

"Toledo Arms," he told me.

I was checking the Belmont results on the radio. I looked around, saw he was a middle-aged guy, well-built, well-dressed. I still didn't

Never Kill a Mistress

BY
CARROLL MAYERS

Five grand is such a small amount—compared to ten.

pay him too much attention; those race results were bad news.

"Yes, sir," I said. I flipped my flag, drove to the Toledo on Park.

Two nights later, I picked him up again, made the same run. The following week, twice more. By then we were at the small-talk stage. Baseball, the fights, the horses. Especially the horses. He kidded me once when I told him the bookies were crowding me.

I said, "Everybody got problems, Mr. Heddon."

Using his name surprised him. I said, "I saw your picture in the financial pages. Hope you get that board promotion."

He thanked me for my interest, gave me a dollar tip.

Yeah, by that time I knew Heddon was a financial big shot. But that newspaper article mentioned he lived with his wife at a Madison address — and that sure wasn't the Toledo Arms. I began to get ideas. I figured Heddon had a chippie on the fire.

The third week, I was practically certain of it. Paying off at the Toledo, Heddon eyed my license suddenly, said, "I've been wondering, Solek. Any possibility your arranging to pick me up here at twelve-thirty?"

I kept my face straight. I figured he knew his playing around would attract less attention if he tied in with one specific hacker. I said, "Sure, Mr. Heddon, if I'm in the neighborhood. But I've got to keep rolling. If I'm all the way across town . . . "

He nodded. He was a handsome bastard — dark features, hair-line mustache, somber eyes. He pulled an extra bill from his wallet. "Let's say you'll . . . try?" he smiled.

The bill was a ten. I took it, smiled back at him. "I'll see what I can do," I said.

That's how it went. Eight times the next three weeks I picked up Heddon outside his office, drove him to the Toledo. I missed the twelve-thirty return pickup only twice. The six times I did make it, Heddon had me drive him to his own apartment on Madison. He gave me a ten-buck tip each time.

Got a cigarette, Lieutenant? The hell with the doc; it won't make any difference . . . thanks.

Now tonight. Earlier, I drove Heddon to the Toledo, but at twelve-fifteen I was up in Harlem. I was feeling sour, not too keen about dashing back downtown by half-past. The night's take was lousy, I had a headache, and I was really jammed with the bookies.

Still, I figured I owed it to Heddon if I could make it. He'd slipped me all those heavy tips and one more wouldn't hurt. So I got rolling, ran some lights, reached the Todelo on the dot.

He'd always been prompt to show. Tonight, though, he came out even before I'd braked, walking fast, almost running. Like he'd been

in the lobby, waiting for me.

Then I got a look at his face. The guy was sweating, his lips twitching, a bleak light in his eyes.

I watched as he flopped back on the cushions. I asked, "You feeling okay, Mr. Heddon?"

He said, "I'm all right. Just a touch of indigestion—"

I started to let in the clutch; Heddon stopped me. "Wait," he said. He was bending forward, studying me. I could see the light in his eyes changing. And he wasn't sweating or twitching so much. He walked away from that indigestion pitch, said, "I'm in a spot, Solek. I can use your help."

I cut the motor. "The dame?"

We'd never brought the chippie into the open before. Heddon merely nodded.

I said, "What about her?"

His eyes were hot. "She's dead," he told me.

I watched him as closely as he watched me. I said, "You kill her?"

"It was an accident," he told me. "We . . . spent the evening. Then, ten minutes ago, we had an argument. I slapped her. She fell, cracked her skull on the coffee table."

I said, "The cops could be nasty."

Heddon's jaw bunched. "They could. That's why I can use your help. We'll take the body away, dump it. An accident victim, head cracked on the curb. Maybe a mugger."

I sat there looking at him. He gripped my shoulder. "Help me with this, Solek, you won't regret it."

I said, "It's damned risky."

He told me, "Five thousand, man. I'll give you five thousand dollars."

I thought about it. Five grand. Just for dumping a body. Five grand to live it up, quit hacking, get those lousy bookies off my back . . .

Yeah, I went along. I drove my hack to the rear of the building and we went up the service stairs. The chippie's apartment was on the third floor. When we got there, we made certain nobody was in the corridor before we eased out of the stairwell. Heddon had his key ready and we slipped inside the apartment fast.

The dame's body sprawled face up beside the living room coffee table. One glance, I could understand why Heddon had been playing around. The babe was blonde, beautiful and busty. She was wearing only a flimsy negligee. There was a nasty bruise at her left temple, but no blood.

Heddon said grimly, "I wanted to break off for awhile. Until that board promotion came through, so there'd be no chance of a scandal to foul it up. But she wouldn't listen—"

He broke off. He said, "That's why we've got to carry this off, Solek. That's why—"

I cut him short. "So we've got a reason," I said. "Now let's get

her dressed. You know where she keeps her clothes?"

Heddon nodded, disappeared into the bedroom, began slamming drawers, rattling hangers. I stood waiting for him, looking down at the dame.

Here comes the doc, Lieutenant. Ask him for some water, huh?

So we got the body dressed, got it out of the apartment, down to my hack. By that time, Heddon was sweating and twitching again and I was steaming myself.

Heddon wanted to dump the body someplace miles away, like maybe the Village, but I wasn't risking a drive across town with a corpse. "The nearer to where she'd normally be, the less likely the cops are to doubt a legitimate accident," I told him.

He saw my point. We sat in my hack at the rear of the building for ten minutes. Nothing happened. No lights flicking on, no voices. It looked like we'd been unnoticed.

Satisfied, I drove around to the street, parked across from the Toledo's entrance. There were few cars, fewer pedestrians. I kept checking, finally saw the street clear. I gave Heddon the sign. We opened the door next to the curb, shoved the body into the gutter. Then I hit the gas.

"So she's mugged crossing the street to get home," I told Heddon. "She falls, splits her head. When she's found—"

What's that, Lieutenant? Headquarters got the flash an hour ago? Well, it doesn't matter now . . .

There's not much more. As soon as it seemed we were in the clear, I eased up, looked back at Heddon. I said, "About that five grand, Mr. Heddon."

He nodded. Now that we'd carried it off, he was getting a grip again. "You'll get it," he told me. "Tonight. My wife's staying with friends."

Tonight was okay with me. I started cutting toward Madison. Heddon touched my shoulder, said, "Just one thing, Solek. I wouldn't want you getting ideas about your position."

I laughed at him. I said, "Don't worry. I dealt myself in for five G's and that's all."

Only it wasn't all. I'd already been kicking the thought around. Five grand was good. But ten was better — for a start.

That's where I made my first mistake. I figured I had Heddon over a barrel. I figured I could squeeze him, but good.

When we reached his apartment, Heddon took me into the library, pointed toward a cellarette. "Fix yourself a drink," he told me. He moved on across the room, swung a portrait aside, began opening a wall safe.

I passed up the drink. He turned around, extending two packets of bills. He said, "There you are. Five thousand."

I shook my head, grinning at

him. "All of a sudden, I've changed my mind. Suppose we make it ten – for now."

His breath sucked in, his eyes turning mean. "I warned you."

I said, "I heard you. I've still changed my mind."

For a minute he just stood there, glaring at me. Then he swung around slowly, dipped into the safe again. I figured he knew I had him, was fishing for extra cash. But when he suddenly jerked around, he was holding a stubby .38 automatic.

That's when I made my second mistake. I didn't think Heddon would ever use that gun.

So I let my grin spread. I said, "What the hell do you think you'll do with that?" I began to move toward him.

He was sweating again, his lips curled back, his eyes hot. He said softly, "You can't blackmail me, Solek. I'll kill you first."

I changed my grin to a sneer. I kept moving toward him and he kept backing away. I said, "Give me the gun."

He was in a corner now, trembling. I laughed, reached for the .38. Suddenly, he knocked my hand down, grappled with me. I wrestled him around; he wouldn't give up the gun. And then the gun blasted – three times – and the slugs tore into my guts.

I sank to my knees. A haze swirled before my eyes. The floor tipped and I slumped over on my face. Far off, I caught the sound of pounding on the foyer door and then it burst open and people were shouting . . .

That's it? Yeah, just about, Lieutenant. Except for one thing. Like I said, I saw the doc give you the word. I know this's it, so I might as well tell you the joker.

Heddon's clean with me; it was an accident, self-defense. But the poor bastard was clean with the chippie, too. She wasn't dead, only unconscious from a bad crack. Waiting for Heddon to come back with her clothes, I saw her eyelids quiver. That's when I realized five grand or more was slipping right through my fingers.

Yeah, Lieutenant, I finished the chippie. I kicked her in the temple three times before Heddon got back.

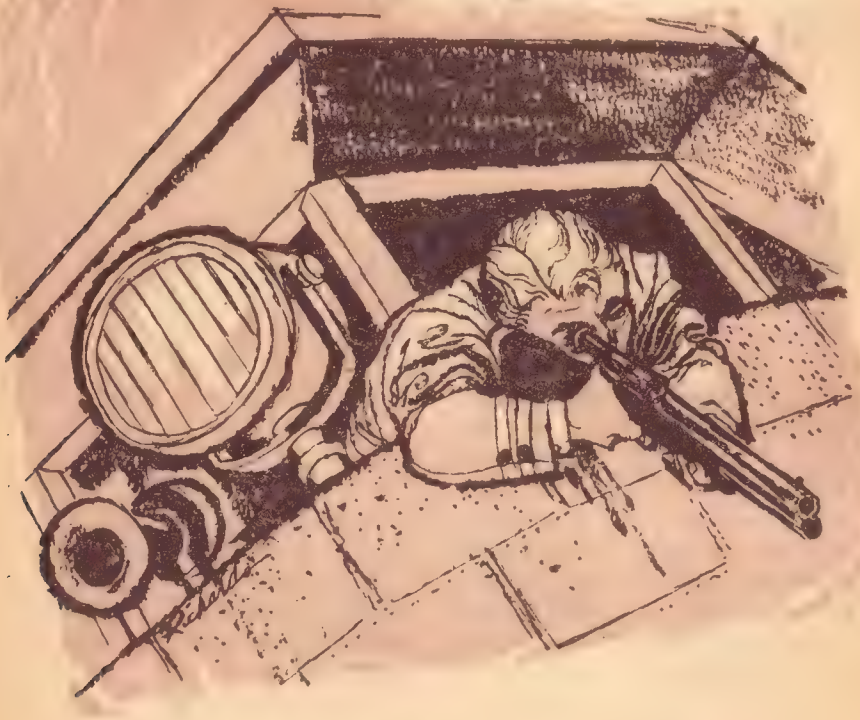
WARDEN WALTERS was smiling when he came into my office. I turned and watched him amble toward my desk. His face sobered as he came closer.

"What's the matter, Hugh?" he asked in a slightly anxious tone.

"I don't know, Warden. Something's in the air. It's electric."

His face remained serious. I had been right too many times during the past ten years that I'd been his head guard at the prison. Sometimes he told the other guards I smelled trouble like a bloodhound.

"What do you think it's all about?" he asked, as he leaned his



Shoot Them Down

If he couldn't shake free, Drumright was ready to die . . . and take me with him.

BY BOB BRISTOW

full weight against my desk.

"I don't know. I've sent for a stoolie."

"Who?"

"Willie Jessup. You remember him. He's the one tipped us on the Dutcher-Robbins break last year. I figure he'll know something."

"Probably nothing to it," he said grinning. But when I glanced at him, he wrinkled his brow slightly. "But you go ahead, Hugh. Good idea to keep your finger on the pulse. I can't see a riot coming up. They seem too satisfied."

"It's something, Warden. I know it. I'll check with you after I've talked to Jessup. Will you be around today?"

"Sure," he said. "I'll be here all day." He strolled easily from the office.

I liked him. He was my kind of man. He learned prisons by the book, but I'm not one of those guys that can't stand to see a man with an education take the top spot. He studied penology, criminology, all of that stuff, and he can tell a lot about a con by watching the way he lights a cigarette. He's smart and he's wide awake.

When he got the job, I wasn't sure. But after about a week, he started asking "why" it was this way, and "why" we did it another way. Pretty soon a few new ideas began to take their place. Not an overnight change, like some would have done, Walters eased his changes in so that, unless you were keeping tab, you wouldn't notice the differences.

The cons liked him. He brought the reform movement to us. Better conditions, better food, extra privileges, stuff like that. But he was smart. He knew that you can be just so nice to the cons and then you had to draw a line, a sharp, clear line that they'd all see. His prison wasn't becoming a country club. It was still prison, more tolerable, but a prison, and we didn't let the cons forget it.

That was my job. As guard captain, I was the hand of authority. I learned my criminology and penology one day when I was fourteen. My dad was a guard and they brought his body home to us, after a con had driven a shiv into his back.

I was the one who kept reminding the cons that this was still a prison. There were no beatings, no solitary for long stretches, and no chain gangs. But they knew, every moment, that they were in prison and that prison wasn't fun.

The misguided kids who had fallen into trouble were gently, but firmly, led back toward a world of decency. The cons who had made more than one mistake were watched a little closer. The prison psychiatrist worked on them constantly, trying to make them see the difference between right and wrong, so that after they got out they wouldn't be back in a year or two.

And then there were the big time boys. The cons who never quite got it through their heads that hour for hour, year for year, a career of crime is the lowest paid profession in the world. They were usually in for a long stretch and would try anything to get out. These were my boys, the wild, the desperate, the dyed in the wool bastards.

And when I felt myself going soft, I remembered my father's body, cold and still in the grave. That took care of it.

As I waited for Jessup, I glanced over a list of known trouble makers. I was half-way down the list when Jessup appeared at the door, nervously fingering the cap in his hand.

Jessup was in for burglary. Forty five years old, whiny voice, sneaky type. He'd sell out his mother for an extra privilege.

"Over here, Jessup," I barked angrily, setting the pace for what was to come.

Jessup moved nervously to the desk, standing rigid before me. I motioned for him to take the chair beside me. He sat, an apprehensive expression frozen on his face. I lit a cigarette and rolled it across the desk to him. He picked it up and puffed on it greedily.

"What is it, Jessup?"

He looked at me quizzically. "What's what?" he asked.

"Don't play dumb, Jessup. What's brewing out there?"

"I don't know of nuthin'," he said in a low voice, glancing about him.

"Come off it," I snapped. "Something's in the air. I know it. Spill it, Jessup. I want to know bad."

He sat there, dragging on the cigarette, studying me with cool eyes.

Suddenly I swung hard. My open hand smacked against his cheek, jarring the cigarette to the floor.

"Didn't bring you up here to play games, Jessup!" I shouted at him. "I want to know what's in the air out there. Let's go, boy. I'm in a hurry."

"I don't know from nuthin'," he answered quickly, his hand covering his cheek. "Honest, I ain't in the know."

"You're lying, Jessup."

He leaned back away from my reach. "Don't hit me again. Please. I don't know nuthin'."

I decided to play it his way. I felt sure he knew. But he was afraid. "Somebody warned you. That's right, isn't it?"

He didn't answer.

"Is it a riot? Is that what it is?"

Jessup glanced around, quickly. For a moment his mouth slipped ajar and I thought he was going to spill. But he didn't. "I don't know of nuthin'," he repeated like a parrot.

I pointed a pencil at him menacingly. "If it comes off, Jessup, if it happens and I find out you knew about it, I'll nail you good."

Still, he only shook his head from side to side.

"Just nod if I hit it right. Hear me, Jessup? Just nod."

Jessup swallowed anxiously.

"Riot?"

He didn't move.

"Somebody after a guard?"

Same.

"A murder?"

Nothing.

"A break?"

He didn't nod, but something happened inside him. A very faint change in his eyes, an extra effort not to show any signs, and it gave him away.

"So it's a break?"

"I didn't say that. I didn't say it."

"Have they threatened you?"

"They haven't done nuthin'. There ain't nuthin'. Why don't you lay off me?"

"Are you clean?"

"I'm always clean. You know that. I've helped you guys a lot. You know, before. But lay off me now. Please, I got to get back."

I tossed him my pack of cigarettes. "Thanks, boy," I said. "Take off."

Jessup unwound from the chair and beat it real fast. I decided to make a check of the gates. As I left, I passed Warden Walter's office. It occurred to me that I should tell him that maybe a break was in the making. But it was too vague. I'd find out the details and then tell him.

There are two gates to the prison. One is the shakedown gate that the trusties and prison farm cons use. The other is the front gate. That's used by prison personnel. I made the con gate first. A guard shack is built on top of the wall, equipped with guns, ammunition, search light, tear gas and stuff. In the shack is the lever that controls the opening and closing of the heavy gate. Eric McCombs was on duty. Good man, Eric. Tight-lipped. Serious. Efficient to the last letter. Also, a damned good shot.

"Hugh Miller," he said smiling, "what brings you?"

I glanced around at the cons milling about the prison yard. "I smell somethin'," I said. "Noticed anything going on the last few days?"

"No," Eric rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I can't think of anything."

"Has anybody been extra good for no reason?"

He grinned. "I haven't noticed nobody bein' extra good."

Still watching the groups of cons below, I said, "If anybody starts out, stop 'em. If it's wrong, open fire and we'll ask questions later. Nobody goes out unless it's right. Mow 'em down if you have to. Follow?"

"Sure, Hugh," he said softly.

"Call if you see anything unusual."

I started for the other gate, mulling over some of the bad boys in

my mind. And one, just one, stuck in my head until I couldn't think about anybody else. His name was Keith Drumright. He was in for life, convicted of the murder of a bank teller. He'd been in on the planning of a break three or four months back, that had never come off.

I reached the other gate. Charlie Bates was on duty. Charlie had been a guard since the depression days. He was good, but the years were beginning to catch up with him. Still, you don't fire a man like Charlie Bates. There's always a place for a man with that much experience. He was in the right spot.

"Noticed anything funny goin' on, Charlie?" I asked.

"No, sir," he said raising an eyebrow. "Been quiet lately."

"I may be wrong," I said, looking out over the yard. From the top of the wall, through the windows of the guard shack, the prison stretched out like a giant ant bed.

I'm wrong sometimes. Maybe more often than I'd like to admit. I lit a cigarette and leaned against the door of the shack. Maybe I was getting the jitters, trying to keep at least one thought ahead of every dangerous con in this human zoo. But the quick glances I got this morning from some of the boys had given me that uneasy feeling. And then there was the way Jessup had acted.

It's not imagined, this tension I felt. I'd been through it before too many times. It's like walking into a dark room and knowing the minute you are inside that someone else is there. Okay. So this time maybe I was wrong.

The phone in the guard shack buzzed twice. Charlie moved easily inside and lifted the phone.

"Yes sir," he said. "I'll be ready for you, Warden."

He replaced the phone and turned back.

"What was that?" I asked.

"The warden. Says he's going into town on an errand. Wanted me to be ready to open the gate."

The pieces fell into place suddenly. I brushed past Charlie, jerked the phone and buzzed the warden's office. One . . . two . . . four times the buzzer sounded and there was no answer. *"I'll be here all day,"* he had told me.

I wheeled to the door of the shack as the black limousine swept around the corner of the concrete drive to the gate.

The car moved swiftly, slowed, then stopped thirty feet from the gate. Charlie reached for the lever to open it, but I got to him and grabbed his arm. Warden Walters was sitting in the front seat, a man on each side of him. Three men were in the back. My eye fell on the driver. It was Keith Drumright. Warden Walters sat staring up at us, his face a mask of death.

"It's a break, Charlie," I said, feeling my breath growing short.

Charlie reached inside the shack and grabbed the riot gun from the wall. He eyed me frantically, waiting for the signal to fire.

"Hold it!" I yelled.

I heard Drumright. "Open it up fast or the warden'll get his."

Then the warden's voice, following the pattern he himself had initiated. "Shoot, Hugh! Shoot it out!"

Drumright turned in the seat and swung hard. The gun butt smashed against the warden's head and he slumped, a trickle of blood moving from his temple.

Charlie waited for me to give him the word to fire, the gun trained on the windshield.

"Let us out or we'll kill him!" Drumright shouted.

I tried to think, tried to wipe away the numbness from my mind. Drumright was going all out this time. If he didn't make it, he'd take the warden to the grave with him.

"You don't have a chance," I yelled. "They'll get you before you get two miles." I was stalling. There had to be an out, an angle.

"You lousy sonofabitch!" Drumright roared.

The rear door of the limousine opened and a man was shoved free. It was a guard and he hit the pavement, rolled and got up running. Drumright turned in the seat and fired with his right hand. I saw the gun jump in his hand. Twice. The guard dropped to the pavement and struggled to crawl. The gun barked again and the guard shivered, lay still.

It was very quiet for an instant. Then the alarm system was thrown.

Drumright jerked his head up toward the shack. "Open up or we'll roll the warden out next."

Drumright changed the gun to his left hand, aimed toward the guard shack and fired. He was aiming for me, because he knew I was the stop gap. But with his left hand his shot went wild. Charlie spun half around, his face suddenly knifed with fear, blood spreading over his right shoulder. Slowly he slipped to the floor of the shack. I was the only one left. I was the one that had to open the gate.

Charlie's fingers still held the riot gun. "Take it," he said breathing hard. I reached for the lever to open the gate, but I knew it was useless. They had killed one man, maybe another, and if they got outside they'd kill the warden a few miles down the road. There was only one chance. *Stop them here. Now.*

I grabbed the rope ladder and threw it over the wall, and went over the side. I heard the gun fire, felt concrete sprinkle my face. Five. That made five shots. They probably had only one gun and Drumright was trying to fire it from the driver's seat with his left hand. I hit the ground and another shot splashed near me. *Six. He's got three more, and he's wild.*

I crawled directly toward the car, tearing my sleeves, bruising my knees. I was ten feet away, too close for Drumright to fire the automatic again because of the windshield. I heard the gears grind and looked up to see the car bearing down on me.

I waited until the last moment, just before the wheels reached me, and I rolled. Drumright swerved to get me, but he was too late. I heard a voice inside the car. "Did you hit him?"

"I missed."

"Let's get out of this rat hole," somebody shouted fearfully. The sirens were all going now. The break was folding, but I knew that Drumright would either drive out or be carried out. Either way I knew the Warden's chances of remaining alive were slim.

The gears growled and the car shot into reverse. I grabbed the rear axle and felt my body dragging. My back became hot. I felt my shirt rip, felt the flesh being rolled from my shoulders.

"I don't see 'im."

"I'll get him," Drumright said. The car jerked to a stop. He had three shots. I scooted under the car as I saw Drumright's foot hit the pavement. I grabbed it, pressing my legs against the bottom of the car, twisting his foot with all my strength. He went down, turning. He fired as he hit the concrete, but he had fired too soon. *Two left.* I pulled him toward me, trying to make my mind function over the terrible scream of the sirens. Then suddenly he wasn't fighting. He was giving in, he was coming under.

"Give it up, Drumright," I said. "You can't make it."

I heard him laugh, a crazed, desperate laugh, because he knew that probably I was right. It was the laugh of a man ready to die, but who wanted you to go with him.

He shoved his face under the car and rammed his hand toward me. I hit it as it came under and the gun exploded with a deafening roar, the bullet smashing into the bottom of the car.

I grabbed for the gun. He had one slug. Just one more, and if I could beat that one, the tiger was dead. I had his arm with both my hands. He jerked frantically. I tried to keep the muzzle out of my face, but Drumright could count. He knew! This one was going to be good; it had to be.

He was half under the car, when he pressed his leg against the outside of the car and I felt his arm slipping away, felt the sleeve tear, the sweaty flesh slip from my grasp. I stared in horror as he eased back, his face insanely wild. I rolled for the far side of the car. I made one turn and when I faced him again I heard the shot. I felt the hot, burning sensation in my stomach. Drumright got to his knees.

I rolled free of the car, raising

on my elbow, feeling the pulsating ache in my stomach, my hand stained red with blood. Drumright was running toward the ladder. He was going upstairs to throw the lever himself and he'd get that riot gun when he did.

I looked up at the top of the wall. Charlie was pulling himself up on his elbows. Drumright scooted right up the ladder. He reached the top, his head peering over, his arm grabbing for the rail.

I heard a muted *tat . . . tat . . . tat . . . tat . . .* and Drumright's hand dropped limply, his body sagged for a moment, then fell backward, silent, almost graceful, before he smashed against the concrete.

Charlie swung around toward the car on his stomach, the barrel weaving feebly. A voice screamed over the roar of the sirens, "We give up!" The cons started coming out of the car, but Charlie hadn't heard them. He got them as they came out, both of them tumbling in a heap beside the door.

Then the old man's body failed, the riot gun slipped from his hands and fell over the side of the wall.

I leaned back on the hot pavement, the steady drone of sirens throbbing in my ears. The warden stumbled from the car and hunkered down beside me.

In a few minutes a white ambulance swung close to the car. The prison doctor hovered over me, tearing away my clothes, examining my wound. Slowly his face relaxed. "I guess you know you're lucky," he said.

It was the best news I'd had all day.

Mayhem

Explanations were in order when Chicago police apprehended Harry Owens, 36, of Dallas, Tex., with a revolver, 11 daggers and three switch-blade knives in his car. Owens explained the gun by stating that his hobby was shooting, and added that "I throw daggers and knives to amuse myself." When asked about the tear gas gun, Owens replied: "I guess I like to see people cry."

Dancing Dilemma

When Mrs. Doris Hamsher, 30, of Knoxville, Tenn., appeared in court to face a car theft charge, she was limping. She explained that the night before, she had been dancing to *The Tennessee Waltz,* but then "someone flipped the juke box to a rock and roll record and I broke my leg changing over."

On a Sunday Afternoon

Five against one. Deadly odds in a spot like Harper's. But sometimes a man must ignore the odds . . .

BY GIL BREWER

DELL HARPER and his wife Julia left their pew and shoved through the nervously subdued congregation. Everyone somehow held themselves back enough to keep from running and shoving in an effort to get home for dinner, make that show, meet Marge or Suzie, reach the car before Dad. The organ continued to moan softly and the Reverend Holdsby appeared at the hall door, perspiring lightly, a fixed smile on his pale lips.

"Better carry Linda," Harper said to his wife. "She'll get herself stomped on. And for gosh sakes, get past Holdsby before he nails us about Christian Endeavor, or we'll never get out to the glen."

Julia Harper looked at her husband and scowled, but she said nothing. She grabbed three year old Linda, who at the moment was interested in the choir loft, picked her up, rested her on her hip.

They escaped to the main entrance hall, and headed for the door. Noon sunlight glared on the brick steps.

"There's Tom Martin," Julia said. She held Linda with one arm, jabbed at her hair with her other hand, and looked as if she wanted to smile.

"Now, for cripes' sake," Harper said. "Don't start gabbing."

Julia didn't seem to hear him. Linda said something about, "Wanna fickle do, Mommy! Fickle do naw!"

"All right," Julia Harper said. "We'll be home in a little while. Then you can."

Martin pinned them in a small bottleneck on the steps. "Only got a minute," he said. "Nan's waiting in the car. Why don't you folks stop over this afternoon?" He paused, stripping cellophane from a cigar. "We could have some coffee and sandwiches later on – maybe play a few hands of bridge." He bit off the end of the cigar, spat it across the church steps, and grinned at Julia.

Julia smiled b a c k brightly, glanced at her husband.

Martin snatched the cigar from his mouth and motioned toward Linda. "Bring her along, too – of course."

Harper checked his wrist watch. "Sorry as the deuce, Tom. We planned something else. Thanks, though – for asking."

Julia patted Linda's bottom, frowned, and chewed the edge of her lower lip.

"Oh?" Martin said.

"Little picnic – out to the glen."

Julia spoke suddenly, a shade too loudly. "Why don't you and Nan come along?" She said it to Martin, but she looked at her husband as she spoke.

Martin found a match, looked at it. "No – we can't," he said. "Feel kind of tired. Just want to lay around, anyways."

"We'd better get moving," Harper said.

"Maybe next Sunday?" Martin called.

Harper said nothing. Julia turned and flashed another smile back across Linda's shoulder. They moved slowly through the sun-dappled church crowds into the parking area, located their Ford sedan.

"Wow," Harper said. "Like an oven. Wait'll I roll the windows down."

Julia waited, holding Linda, looking at the bustle of the crowded parking area.

"Come on, will you?" Harper called with a trace of irritation. "You're the one wanted to get out to the God damned glen. We'll no more'n get there, we'll have to come back. Get the lead out. It's my only day off – you *know* that."

Julia ignored his whining tone, slipped into the front seat with Linda, then allowed the three year old to climb over into the back.

Harper savagely started the engine and backed out, heading for the street. Julia adjusted her pale blue skirt over her round knees, patted the small and wilted corsage of flowers she'd made that morning.

"There's Brady," Julia said. "He's waving, Dell."

"Oh," Harper said, flapping his hand without looking. "I'm hungry as a bear. You?"

"I suppose so."

"What the hell's the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

"Something's the matter. I can tell."

Julia said nothing. She looked out the window and closed her eyes.

Linda was bubbling about something in the back seat, her round face mashed against the side window, the fingers of one hand curled into her pale yellow hair.

Harper turned onto Central a bit too speedily, narrowly missing the side of a city bus. A yellow and chrome hot rod roared past them, loaded with young laughing faces. The driver flipped the cut-out on the muffler twice.

"Juvenile delinquents," Harper said. "My God, look how fast they're goin! They don't give a damn for anybody. The world's crazy – I tell you, it's crazy. Crazy kids. I'd just like to get close enough to one of them sharpies, by God."

"What would you do, Dell?" Julia said, her eyes still closed, facing the window.

"They need a lesson, that's what they need. A good lesson. Somebody show 'em what for. Drunk, an' taking dope – like they do." He lifted one hand from the steering wheel and squeezed it into a fist. "A good lesson – the old-fashioned way."

Julia said nothing. They drove on home.

"Hurry up and change," Harper said from the bathroom. "What you wearing?"

His wife did not reply.

Something thumped downstairs.

"Hope she's not in the God damned lunch," Harper said. "You got it all packed, didn't you?"

"Yes, Dell."

Harper came into the bedroom. "Guess I'll wear these old suntans."

"Why don't you wear shorts?"

He ignored her, climbing into the tan khaki trousers. He was tall and boney, with reddish-brown hair that was sparse across pink skull. Pale blue eyes regarded the world with suspicion from behind rimless glasses. He buttoned and belted his trousers, yanked a white T-shirt over his head, tucked it in partly, then glanced toward his wife.

"Hurry up God damn it. Will you?"

She stood in front of her closet, running her hands through the racked clothes. They had been mar-

ried six years. They had both been eighteen at the time of the ceremony, and Dell had just landed the job with the paint supply house — a job which he still held, through two promotions and three raises. They had both been skinny kids at the time of their marriage, striking out for the mysterious *something*.

Dell hadn't put on much weight since. Julia had. In brief white pants and brassiere, she was a lush and lovely woman. Thick black hair waved and massed across olive-skinned shoulders. Her waist was strikingly slim and firm, her hips sharply curving out and down to long-thighed, smoothly-rounded legs. Her breasts were large and high-peaked. Her face was sometimes piquant, sometimes sad — often both, the dark eyes a shade too thoughtful, the pouting, red-lipped mouth curiously immobile. She was possessed of a strange, almost electric nervousness that kept her forever on the go.

"Well, by gosh, I'm going to be cool!" She snatched something from a hook in the closet. She stepped into a pair of white shorts that were high and tight when she got them fastened. She struck a pose, looked at her husband through half-lidded eyes, and grinned. He lit a cigarette, staring at her. She turned, pulled a thin yellow jersey over her head, glanced at the full length mirror on the back of the door, and said, "Let's go, then."

Harper stomped toward the bedroom door. As he passed her, she touched his arm lightly, smiling up at him, a sudden and emphatic flash of crystal invitation. "Like my shorts, huh? You haven't seen 'em."

"Fine," he said, leaving the room, stomping down the hall.

She continued to smile for a moment. Then she forgot the smile and looked at herself in the closet mirror again. Her lips were parted and she breathed heavily, her eyes darker than they had been. There was a kind of viciousness in her fingers as she crimped the edges of the shorts still higher, until they bit into the soft swollen flesh of her thighs. She checked herself from the side, arching her back, yanking the jersey down tightly. "God damn," she said. *"God damn! God damn!"*

"We'll have to stop for gas," Harper said. "Meant to fill her up this morning. Clean forgot. There's a place I know down the road. We'll stop there."

Linda was standing on the back seat, staring out the rear window. She wore a blue playsuit, and was jumping up and down, softly chanting, "Hungy . . . hungy . . . hungy . . ."

"Why don't you give her a sandwich—shut her up?" Harper said. "You made plenty, didn't you?"

"God damn right," Julia said. "Better if she waits, though."

Harper craned his neck, frown-

ing at her. Then he turned his gaze ahead and said, "There's the station."

Harper pulled the car off the main highway into a small country gas station with two red pumps. He stopped the car by the cement island and climbed out as the stocky, overalled attendant strolled out of the paint-peeled office.

"Fill 'er up," Harper said. "Check everything. Battery, water, tires—the works. An' be sure to wash that windshield. Better catch the rear window, too. All this dust."

The attendant began to whistle.

Julia, sitting in the car, nervously flipped the sun-visor down on her side and arched her back slightly, stretching up so she could see herself in the small mirror. She opened her white-beaded purse, dipped in and brought out a large gold-cased lipstick, and worked on her lips. They were already quite red, but she went over them still more heavily. Finally she sighed, put the lipstick away, folded the visor back with a flip of her hand, and opened her door. She climbed out, glanced at Linda. Linda was occupied watching the cars and trucks whizz by on the main highway.

Harper was discussing oil grades with the attendant. Julia looked around, then wandered over to the map rack on the wall of the office, beside the doorway. *Georgia. Florida. Mississippi. South Carolina. North Carolina. Virginia. Delaware. Oregon . . .* she withdrew the Oregon roadmap from the black metal rack, opened it, her face quite sober.

A gleaming yellow and chrome car, not more than three feet high all around, shot roaring off the highway and slid to a grinding stop on the gravel just off the cement, inside the gas station area. There were five young men in the car. The hood of the engine was off, and chrome and nickel furnishings sparkled with a hard brilliance in the sunlight. It was as clean and sparkling as an expensive china steak platter.

Julia turned, holding the roadmap.

The driver of the hot-rod, a tall, broad-shouldered, yellow-haired youth with a violent sunburn, wearing khaki shorts and mocassins, gunned the engine loudly. They all roared with laughter.

The driver shut the engine off, leaped over the side of the car and crouched low and yelled, *"Look at that!"*

"Va – va – *VOOM!*"

"Hot rivets!"

"Bite me!"

Shrill whistles soared crazily into the sunlight, cutting through the afternoon with that same hard brilliance the car itself possessed—edged, clean, glasslike.

"Oh – daddio!!"

"Hit me!" one of the boys yelled. "Bash me – sock me – hit me!" He leaped from the car, ran around to where the yellow-haired youth

stood and stuck his chin out. "Knock me cold!"

The yellow-haired youth rapped his chin with a big fist, laughing. The other faked a backward stagger, turned fast and looked at Julia, eyes bugging. Then he ran around the side of the car, yelling like an Indian. He reached over the side of the car, came up with a brown pint bottle and gulped from it. He sprawled against the side of the car, gasping.

"I'll never make it now, boys. Never make it now. I seen the light."

Julia turned and tried to fold the roadmap, so she could put it away. It wouldn't fold right. Each time she moved, the round flesh of her hips bunched under the tight shorts. She gave up trying to fold the map and jammed it at the rack, her hands trembling.

"What the hell's going on here?" Harper said, walking toward Julia.

The yellow-haired lad pulled himself erect, then went very loose all over, like a released sack of potatoes, and lurched in an affected stagger toward Julia. He came up close to her, ignoring Harper. He looked Julia up and down beadily, his mouth hanging open. The rest of the young men in the glinting hot-rod vaulted out and formed a pack behind the yellow-haired driver.

"Baby," he said in a stage whisper. "I can't stand it. Do something before I shoot myself."

The roadmap fell out of the rack. Julia Harper's face and throat had become violently red. She tried to walk away. The yellow-haired youth blocked her path.

Harper shouted, "God damn! Get away! What you doing there?" His voice lowered. "What is this?"

The yellow-haired one turned abruptly, ran over to the others, spoke quickly, and they all formed a straight line across the front of the gas station. They stared at Harper.

"Dress right," the yellow-haired one snapped. "Dress!"

The line straightened.

Julia hurried to the car, got in and closed her door.

"What the hell's going — ?" Harper broke off his question.

He stared at them. They returned his stare. They stood very straight, lips tight, watching him.

The attendant came over to Harper. "Bring you your change," he said, then went around the line of boys and inside the office.

Harper stood furiously in front of the line, his mouth faintly moving, but saying nothing. The attendant returned and handed Harper some change, then went quickly over to the gas pumps.

"All right, men," the yellow-haired one said, jumping lightly out in front of the other four. "Atten—*shun!* Pre-e-e-e-e-sent—*arms!*"

The yellow-haired leader turned and they all held their arms out toward Harper. Each face was em-

phatically sober and deeply sincere.

Harper wheeled and stalked stiffly toward the car, jamming the change into his pocket. He turned suddenly toward the stocky attendant.

"What's going on around here?" Harper said, making his lips tight, scowling. "Who are they? What the hell's the idea?"

The attendant glanced at him swiftly, then headed for the office, making it clear that he didn't want to get mixed up in what was brewing.

"You check everything I told you?" Harper called.

The attendant did not reply.

"Hey, you! Did you check everything?"

Linda called, "Hungy . . . hungy," from the rear seat.

The young men still stood at attention with their arms held rigidly out.

"Please, Dell," Julia said. "Come on — let's go."

Harper said, "I'd like to — "

Angrily, he climbed beneath the wheel of the car, started the engine, and they drove off. As they swung into the highway, a loudly shouted chorus of laughter roared into the early afternoon.

"My God!" Harper said.

Julia Harper stared straight ahead through the windshield, her face strained and slightly pink. Her legs were close together and she held her hands clasped tightly around the white-beaded purse in her lap.

Harper started to speak but there was something in his throat. He tried to clear it away. He gripped the steering wheel very hard, his shoulders rigid.

"That attendant ignored the whole God damned thing," he said. "He acted like he was scared of those hoodlums."

Julia said nothing.

"Hungy," Linda said, jumping up and down on the rear seat. "Hungy . . . hungy!"

Harper turned sharply to his wife. "I should've — what'd you do? *What did you do?*"

"How do you mean, Dell?"

"Listen to me. You *must've* done *something*. You heard them. My God, I never saw — I felt like really letting them have it. That's the God's truth. I didn't know what to do, I tell you."

Julia drew a deep breath and let it out. "It was nothing, really. They're just kids, Dell. They weren't really mean and they wouldn't really start anything."

"You're right, there. No guts. No guts in the pack of 'em. Kids."

They drove for a time.

"It was like you could feel it," Harper said.

Julia had her eyes closed. She opened them. "What?"

"I don't know. Like — something. Like there's no law, no — nothing. Gutless kids — doing a thing like that. What could I do? Tell me that?" He looked at his wife again. "I wish you'd tell me what it was

you did, God damn it."

"I didn't do anything. Dell. I just stood there. That's all. I was just standing there, looking at a map. That's all."

They drove for a time.

"I didn't do a thing. Just stood there."

"Yeah. You think I should report them?"

"What could you report?"

"You're right. They're gone now." He sighed, moved his shoulders around. "They got my goat, I'll tell you that, though. I should've grabbed that one, that ringleader." He clenched and unclenched his fist on the steering wheel. "Brassy little bastard."

Julia said nothing. She turned on one hip, tugged at her shorts, rested her chin in the cup of her hand, looking out the window. She closed her eyes again.

The sound of a horn blaring came along swiftly behind them, wailing, growing louder with a frightening speed.

"It's them again," Julia said.

"What?" Harper said. "Who?"

She did not answer. The roar of an engine and the scream of a horn was upon them. It swept past, yellow-bright, screaming laughter, shouting, horn blatting. The yellow hot-rod careened in front of them, then leapt away and was soon out of sight.

Nobody said anything.

Finally, they reached the stone-vaulted entrance to the park in the glen. There was no sign whatever of the yellow car.

"Hungy," Linda said, and began to cry.

"This is a good spot," Harper said. "I just don't want to be down there in the main park with all those damned people."

They were on a dirt road that wound high above the park. They had come through pine woods, and were opposite the top of a waterfall. It was a pleasant, completely isolated site, and Harper drew the car in beneath the shade of a young elm and some pines, beside a stone fireplace.

"We should've brought hamburgers," Julia said, climbing from the car. She stood there a moment and tugged at her shorts with both hands, then opened the rear door and let Linda out. Linda ran toward the stone fireplace and began slapping it with both hands.

"Not so hungry, anyway," Harper said. Then he said quickly, "I *will* be, probably. How about waiting awhile, huh? O. K.?"

"I'm starved, Dell — really. Let's eat. If we don't, we'll have trouble on our hands."

He looked at her suddenly.

"I mean, Linda's full of the dickens this afternoon."

Harper brought two blankets from the car, spread them on pine-needled ground. Julia brought the picnic basket and the gallon themos jug of lemonade .

"You'd better get that stack of newspapers in the trunk," she said. "All right?"

"Sure."

Harper began to whistle. He returned to the car, flung open the trunk, picked up an armful of pillows, and the small stack of old newspapers. He closed the trunk and returned to the blankets. The sound of the waterfall rose through the afternoon. Sunlight streaked in slim shafts between the branches of trees. Wind sighed softly in the pines.

"It's nice out here," Harper said. "A few hours away from things — everything. Quiet. I just feel like eating and laying around. Glad we didn't go over to the Martins, aren't you?"

"I thought you weren't hungry."

"Am now."

Julia set out the picnic dinner. Sandwiches. A bowl of potato salad. A cake. A thermos of coffee, and the gallon of lemonade. There were pickles and peanut butter, radishes, celery, apples, oranges, olives — the works. The Harpers always ate heavily when they went on a picnic.

Linda ran, fell and sprawled across the blanket, two chubby hands reaching toward the stack of sandwiches on the waxed paper.

After she was picked up, they sat down on the blanket and began eating.

"What'd you think of old Holdsby's sermon?" Harper asked, around a mouthful of chicken.

Julia held a pickle and Linda bit off a small piece, made a face, and spit it out. Julia tossed the small bit that Linda had rejected in among the trees, toward a thick growth of low bushes.

"Oughta use the trash can," Harper said. "What'd you think of—?"

"I didn't listen," Julia said. She looked at him, chewing. She swallowed. "He bored me silly today. I don't know. Sometimes—"

"Yeah, I know."

"What'd you think?"

"I dunno," Harper said, belching lightly.

The distant sound of a car's engine that was being raced filtered up through the woods, the afternoon, above the sound of the waterfall, and seemed to drop like some kind of explosion among them. Neither spoke. Linda was busy with a piece of chocolate cake, her fingers in thick icing.

The sound became louder.

The sound lessened.

Harper seemed to relax.

The sound of the engine increased and abruptly the yellow and chrome car was beside their own, parked, with the shouting young men leaping over the sides, moving toward them.

Harper came halfway to his feet, a chicken sandwich in one hand, chewing, trying to swallow, choking.

The yellow-haired youth walked toward them.

"What you know?" he said. "A picnic. Isn't that nice?"

They all sang in a loud chorus, "We think it's *wonderful.*"

The yellow-haired leader stared at Julia. She was kneeling on the blanket, looking up at him. Harper came all the way to his feet, still chewing, still trying to swallow.

"We want some too," the four young men behind the yellow-haired one sang. "We want a lit-tul bit of ev-ry – thing. We're *hungy!*"

"Hungy," Linda echoed.

"What?" Harper said, managing to swallow.

"Hungy," they sang. "We hungy, daddio."

Julia did not move, kneeling there on the blanket.

The yellow-haired one came around beside Julia and knelt on one knee and flung his arms wide. His sunburn was very bright. "Will you feed us, you sweet little darling? I wouldn't ask your old man, 'cause I know he's mean." He lowered his voice. "But I'd ask you, baby." He stood up and looked across the blanket at the others. "Wouldn't you ask her?" he called.

"We'd ask that baby anything," they chorused. "We think she's the nuts."

Harper stood there. He moved toward them, then stopped. "What?" he said. "Get out of here. What are you doing? You hear me?"

"Please," Julia said to the yellow-haired one. "Go away – leave us alone. Can't you see–?"

"She says can't we see?" the yellow-haired one said. His face had changed. He leered down at her. They all ran over beside her. "She's cra-a-a-azy!" one yelled.

Harper grabbed at a chunky fellow wearing dark blue shorts and an open white shirt. The chunky fellow didn't even look at Harper– he just shoved. Harper reeled violently backwards and fell flat.

"We see you, baby," they chorused, circling Julia.

"We dig you, too," the yellow-haired one said.

Linda giggled and pulled at the chunky one's shoe. He reached down and patted her head. A red-haired youth saw him do it, and moved behind Julia and reached down and smoothed her hair. He snarled both hands in her hair and slowly bent her head back, until she was looking up at him. He leaned close to her and licked his lips.

The yellow-haired one knelt on the blanket. "Look," he said. "Look at all the crazy food." He unwrapped a sandwich. "Chicken sandwiches." He smelled of it, tossed it over his shoulder. He grabbed a handful of olives and threw them up into the air. "Olives," he said. He began to grab everything in sight, one thing at a time, naming it, then throwing it into the air. "Chocolate cake! Zoom! Orange! Ham sandwich! Zoom – zoom! Celery – look at

that crazy celery! Peanut butter!" The jar smashed against a tree. They all began grabbing food and throwing it into the air.

Harper moved toward the yellow-haired one with his hands held out, saying words. The youth picked up the thermos of lemonade. It was open. He sniffed at the opening. "Have you had any of this?" he asked Harper.

"I'll get the cops," Harper said. He shouted, "You hear me? Get out of here and let us alone!"

"Fighting spirit," one of them said.

"He's a gone cat," another said.

"Real gone."

"He's dead."

"He don't like us."

"Shame."

"He *looks* mean."

"Looks and is, two different things."

"He sure ain't is."

"Man, you're frozen solid."

"Crazy."

"Wait," the yellow-haired one said. "He wants some lemonade. He hasn't had any."

Three of them grabbed Harper and held him, forced him down to the ground. The yellow-haired one stood above him and poured the lemonade on Harper's face until the thermos gurgled empty. Harper knelt there, gasping, spraying lemonade.

Julia Harper was on her feet now. "Stop it," she said. She moved quickly toward her husband. "Did you hear me? You boys, stop it—now!"

The red-haired young man grabbed her around the waist, slapped her bare thigh with the flat of his hand. "We got your message, baby," he said.

Julia tried to pull away from the red-head. He yanked her to him harshly, holding her against him, held her face and kissed her. She fought and struggled violently in his arms, but he held her very tightly, kissing her.

The yellow-haired one watched Harper. The young man scratched his head, watching Harper. Harper knelt on the ground, his hair hanging down, covered with lemon rinds and blobs of unmelted sugar. There were lemon pits in his hair.

"Stop!" Julia said sharply. She gasped.

"She's a bomb," the one who held her said. "A great big, wonderful bomb, I tell you. Wasn't I right?"

Harper started to get up.

The yellow-haired one said, "You do what you're thinking and I'll smash your head in." Then he said. "You weren't going to do anything, anyways – were you?"

Harper looked at him, and that was all.

The yellow-haired one said, "My great Jesus Christ. This big man sure scares."

Linda ran around on the blanket, then began to cry.

The yellow-haired one dropped

the gallon thermos and called out, "Billy. Take care of the kid. You got the duty."

"Please!" Julia said.

"She told me 'please'," the redhead said. "Wow!"

Harper stood up, lemonade-drenched. The yellow-haired youth stared at him. Then he stepped over to Harper and shoved him in the direction of Julia and the redhead. Harper stumbled forward and the chunky fellow in the blue shorts brought his foot up and kicked Harper in the face.

Harper fell down and did not move.

"Take care of him," the yellow-haired one said. "Tie him to a tree. He's faking. Hurry up!"

A tall, lanky boy took Linda by the hand and moved quietly over beside the yellow and chrome hot-rod, talking to her. "You going to grow up like your mommy?" he asked. "Tell me the truth, are you?" He paused. " 'Cause if you are, I'll stand right here and wait."

Harper came to his feet again. The yellow-haired one turned lithely, stepped up to him and shook his head sadly. Then he set himself with both feet planted flat and wide apart and struck with his right fist so hard Harper flipped and struck the ground like a plank.

"Now, tie him to a tree, like I said."

Two of them took Harper over to the nearest pine, dragging him along the ground. One ran to the chrome and yellow car and returned with a length of rope. They lifted him to a sitting position and tied him to the tree. He stared groggily, moving his lips – watching his wife, Julia.

"Please, little girl," the one with Linda said. "Tell me the absolute truth now. Don't you fib to me. Are you going to grow them," he made a gesture with both hands near his chest, "like your mama?"

The other four stood in a circle around Julia.

"Dell!" Julia called. "Dell – do something."

They laughed. "He's faking," one of them said.

"You've got to stop this," she said, breathing rapidly. She wasn't crying, but she was close to tears. She stamped her foot. "Go away!" she shouted. "Leave us alone!"

"Oh, crazy!" one of them yelled. "She jiggles!"

"Go ahead and scream your head off," the yellow-haired one said. "Nobody can hear you, darling. The falls makes too much noise. We know, don't we guys?"

"We know ev – ry – thing," they chorused.

" 'Cause we come to this spot a lot," the yellow-haired one said.

"What do you want?" Julia said.

"Strip, baby," the yellow-haired one said. "Just strip, that's all."

"What? Dell – Dell!"

"Run, Julia!" Harper shouted. "For God's sake, run!"

"Strip," the yellow-haired one

said. "Let's see the goodies."

"Are – are you crazy?" Julia said in a whisper. She started backing away from them. They were in a circle around her. One of them knocked his knee against her leg.

"Take your clothes off," the yellow-haired one said. "Or we'll do it for you. Whichever way you like, honey. We're going to have a picnic, too – 'cause we got your message."

"What do you mean?" Julia said.

The yellow-haired one stepped up to her, grabbed the front of her jersey and yanked down on it, ripping it. Then he moved back again.

"Whichever way you want," he said.

Julia Harper stared at them.

"We like to watch," one said.

"Run," her husband said. "Run, Julia – run."

"Well?" the yellow-haired youth said.

Julia Harper looked at them, then slowly lifted her arms and pulled off the jersey. Then she went on just as the yellow-haired youth told her. There was silence now, with only the sound of the waterfall.

Occasionally, Harper heard her cry out. The last of them was over there behind those bushes with her now. Harper had shouted himself hoarse. He still tried to shout off and on. He stared. his eyes sick and gone. He was defeated.

The bushes were not high. Now and again he could see one of their heads come up above the bushes, grimacing. Twice he saw Julia's feet. There was very little noise now. Finally, the fellows came out from behind the bushes, looked at Harper, then walked over to the car. The yellow-haired one, who had been playing with Linda, turned and walked over to Harper. The rest of them came along.

They did not speak. They just looked at him.

"I'll get you," Harper said. "Don't ever forget that. I'll get you – I'll get you . . . "

They formed a straight line in front of Harper and looked down at him soberly and shook their heads in unison. They stood there shaking their heads for a few seconds. Then abruptly, they turned and ran for the yellow and chrome hot-rod, climbed in, and drove off.

Linda came and stood in front of her father and shook her head.

Harper screamed at her. "Stop – stop it!"

She giggled and began running in circles.

"Julia?" he called. "Julia – are you all right?"

He looked up and she had just stepped out from behind the bushes. She had her shorts on and the torn yellow jersey. She moved slowly and she looked pale and sheened with sweat, and as if she might have been crying. Her hair was damp and snarled, and brown pine

needles clung in its dark richness. Lipstick was smeared all around her mouth.

"I couldn't do anything," Harper said. "Don't look at me like that. There was nothing I could do. What could I do against all of *them?* Untie me – quick."

She untied him, and he saw the blazing anger and disgust in her eyes. She walked to the car and got in and sat there. Harper gathered the blankets, the picnic basket and put them in the car. He avoided the gallon thermos. He put Linda in the back seat, then quickly slid behind the wheel.

"We'll call the cops," he said. "Soon as we get to town. First phone we see. We'll stop and phone the cops."

Julia began sobbing, staring straight ahead.

He reached toward her, touched her shoulder. "You all right, We'll stop at a hospital – right away."

She spun away from him, turned and looked at him. Then she flipped the sun-visor down and looked at herself in the mirror. She found her white-beaded purse. Her hands were trembling. She took out her lipstick and as she began to outline her mouth in deep red, apparently oblivious to the way it was smeared, sobs broke convulsively from her.

"I couldn't do anything," Harper was saying. "They knocked the hell out of me, Julia. I couldn't do any–"

"No! No! Of course not!" She threw her purse to one side, tears of anger and frustration streaming down her face. "They – they would've – beat you–"

"You saw how it was."

"Oh, yes. Sure." She was sobbing without restraint now. "I'm glad you didn't – do anything."

"What?" he said, thoroughly puzzled.

Julia straight-armed the sun visor back into place. "I said, I'm glad you didn't do anything, Dell. Because I liked it, Dell. I liked every minute of it. Every God damned minute of it!"

In Seattle, Wash., a client of Attorney Leo F. Richter admitted to the court before he was fined that he had drunk about eight beers. "But I submit, your honor," Richter argued, "that a recent study made at Yale University disclosed that a person cannot become intoxicated by drinking beer." Judge Don Van Fredenburg replied: "That may be true, but the test was made on Yale men."

Perfect Getaway

BY HENRY PETERSEN

Knock him off and keep the entire haul. Easy. Just a bit of planning, that was all.

CLAYTON FALLS was quiet that Wednesday morning as are most small southern towns in the cotton-picking season. The few cars, angled into the curb in front of the parking meters, belonged to the shopkeepers. The business establishments stretched for three blocks and then dwindled into residences, filling stations and, at one end, the town's only hotel.

Jim Peterson, the town constable, sauntered along chatting idly with the merchants as they let down their awnings, washed windows and prepared for the start of a day's business.

Mark Mathews, owner of the

town's printing establishment, hailed Peterson from across the street.

Peterson waved a greeting and continued on his way. As he crossed an intersection, he saw a prewar car parked in front of the town's only bank. A young man sat with the motor running, smoking a cigarette and idly watching the smoke drift through the window.

Inside the bank, they would be getting ready to open. This young man was probably waiting for that, Jim Peterson thought.

But when Peterson was about ten feet from the car, the bank doors burst open violently and a rather effeminate looking young man in a tropical hat and suit with a briefcase in one hand and a gun in the other rushed out. Peterson went for his gun, but there was an orange flash, an explosion in his stomach and everything went black.

When they had shot past the few small houses on the edge of town the gentleman in the Panama suit reached up, took off his hat, removed some bobby pins, and let a mass of golden hair fall loose. The "gentleman" was obviously a girl. Another movement removed her tie and grasped a zipper at her collar that ran neatly out of sight to the crotch of the pants. In a second she was out of the quick change outfit, and clad only in a bathing suit.

The young fellow driving the car checked his watch and then half turned to the girl with a smile, "Three minutes. In two more we'll be on our way."

"So far so good," the girl said and continued stuffing the loot into a motorcycle saddle bag. When she finished, she opened a small ladies' suitcase on the floor, removed a pair of riding jeans, a white blouse, riding boots, but she did not remove the heavy window sash which it also contained. She then stuffed the clothes she had been wearing into the suitcase.

They had been passing through a heavily wooded section, but now ahead and to the right and about fifty yards away there was a break in the line of trees. They approached swiftly and braked to a sudden dusty stop. The driver reached back, grabbed the suitcase, ran about twenty yards off the road with it and pitched it into the stagnant green waters of an old gravel pit.

When he got back to the car, the girl was behind the wheel racing the motor for a quick getaway. He slid in beside her with a grin.

"Five minutes, forty seconds," he said, after a glance at his watch.

"Should be at the bikes in three minutes," she said, taking a sharp turn without slowing down.

The young man reached under the seat and pulled out a black leather motorcycle jacket and slipped into it.

"How do I look?" he asked. "Like a Wild One, huh?"

"We're not out of this yet."

"Look, three minutes after we get on those bikes, we'll be out on the highway. And nobody'll be able to tell us from a couple of ordinary citizens on a motorcycle trip. We got out-of-state plates and drivers' licenses plus phony identification papers. What are you worrying about, Baby? You planned it real well."

She said nothing but she thought, "Yeah, I planned it real well. You'll never know how well I planned it."

She made the turnoff onto a little wagon trail that ran through heavy brush and timber.

The car slid to a stop next to a pile of green brush. They jumped out and began uncovering the sleek new English motorcycles. As the girl strapped the saddle bag to her bike, the young man was about to protest, but thought better of it.

Soon they were thundering down the road, and making good time. Then the road began angling upward, steeply, as it led to the top of a mountain that rose a thousand feet above the highway below it. At the crest, the road veered dangerously to the right and then began its winding descent to the highway. It was a dangerous curve, but the girl wasn't worried; she had taken care of the brakes – no question about that. It was going to be a perfect job. A fifty thousand dollar haul, *and all hers.*

They rode hunched over, intent. The road began to drop sharply away now, one hundred, three hundred, five hundred feet. They were seventy yards away from a bad turn; it was time to slow down. They both retarded their spark and the English jobs backfired furiously. The girl kicked her foot brake. It went all the way to the footrest without any resistance. She hit it again frantically, but uselessly.

"Could I have taken the wrong bike?" she thought.

But she knew she hadn't. The cross she had scratched on the handlebars was shining up at her. She glanced over at the young man. He had been watching her frantic efforts and was smiling.

His smile froze as he began frenziedly kicking at his brake, which she knew could not possibly work.

MANHUNT

GROWS UP!

EFFECTIVE *with the March issue, MANHUNT will be presented for your reading entertainment in a new format. The same fast-paced stories and interesting illustrations—but in the popular standard size.*

Be sure to look for your March issue of Manhunt in it's new format and it's new display position. If you don't readily find Manhunt in your favorite newsdealer's display, ask him for it.

a gem for a man's stocking . . .

season's greetings to the man with the funnybone from the magazine with the sophisticated sense of humor.

nugget

Treat yourself to an artist's holiday in Mexico, stories by John Collier and Alberto Moravia, photographs of some of the most beautiful girls to be found in any season, and a ten-page section of Christmas laughter! These are only a small portion of the holiday dish waiting for you in the new NUGGET.